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A PENNILESS ORPHAN

BY

W. HEIMBURG.



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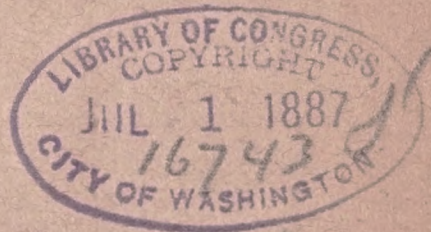
A PENNILESS ORPHAN.

(EIN ARMES MÄDCHEN.)

By W. HEIMBURG.

FROM THE GERMAN BY

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DEDICATED

TO

MY ELLY.

A PENNILESS ORPHAN.

CHAPTER I.

BOTH windows were softly opened, letting the warm, damp, caressing air of spring into a room, where it played about the face of a very young woman—a face that lay strangely pale and still against the white pillows of the couch. The breeze gently lifted the short, thick curls of fair hair from the wan forehead, and it moved the blue curtains which hung around a cradle which had been pushed into the furthest corner of the room, as if it were in the way, no matter where it might be.

“Come away, Hegebach!” said a deep, womanly voice, “the Lord giveth, and He also taketh away, and we must bear it patiently.”

A tall woman, about forty years of age, approached, as she said these words, to the man who knelt motionless before the bed, with his arms thrown wildly over the form of his dead wife. Still he did not move, and the speaker hastily wiped the tears from her clear, bright eyes.

“Hegebach! it will not do; you must not lie here the whole day long, without anything to eat or drink! Come,” she continued, the commanding tone lost in a half-stifled sob, “come, Hegebach; you still have duties. Think of the child!”

He gave a hollow groan and started up. Sorrow had made the face, with its unmistakable military beard, look older than ever; the staring eyes had an almost crazed expression as they gazed at the sweet, peaceful form that

slumbered so quietly. Then, turning suddenly away, he left the room, with clanking spurs, no longer a mourner, but an angry man, with the manner of one who had been deeply injured. The woman, who was thus left alone, drew the white folds of the shroud into place, and stroked the child-like face caressingly; then she took up the cradle from the corner and carried it away.

A cry sounded from the opposite room.

Quickly opening the door, she went into a small chamber, which had only one window; it was very dainty, though almost too simple for a woman of high position, with its fine white curtains and the sewing-table by the window, through which one could see the waving branches and tender green twigs of the lindens in their delicate spring bloom. No one was here, only on the sofa lay a little white bundle, from which a pair of tiny pink hands were stretched out, and an almost helpless cry was heard.

The tall, stately woman sunk suddenly upon her knees before the sofa, and, weeping, buried her face in the little pillow.

"Yes, yes," she whispered; "the world does not smile upon you, poor little thing! Motherless! motherless! And your father acts as though he felt God had done him a great wrong in leaving a baby girl with him! You poor child! why are not you a boy? Every one away, of course! They leave you here to cry, and you are hungry too!"

She stopped and looked at the baby for an instant as if she were considering what to do; then, as it began to cry again, hardly having been pacified:

"Wait, dear, wait!" she said, quickly, lifting the child. "I'll take you to the Burg with me. What would he do with such a baby?"

Two days later, the young wife of Captain von Hegebach was buried; the story of her short life was the one subject of conversation in the whole town, and those who had not known her soon learned that she had been a young girl of

good family, but very poor, and had only married this man, who was so much older and also poor, in order to provide a home for herself.

Nobody had thought that he would ever marry, for he was already an old bachelor, and morose and ill-humored besides. Now it was just a year since he had brought this ray of sunlight to his home. What a wee bit of happiness!

“If it were that at all,” said many others.

Captain von Selchow, indeed, on the way to the house of mourning, assured some of his young comrades he knew from an authentic source “that Von Hegebach’s marriage had only been a *coup de desespoir*. He, Hegebach, had received a letter from his old uncle, ‘the Bennewitzer’—Von Hegebach, of Bennewitz, you know—about fifteen months before, in which the old man had explained clearly and concisely that he did not feel the least inclination to bequeath his fortune to a couple of old bachelors such as his nephews unfortunately appeared to be; he wished to know for whom he had saved his money. Whichever of the two should first announce to him the birth of a legitimate son, he should have the preference. Daughters were not even considered. Hegebach’s cousin, of the Fifth Dragoons, did not answer this epistle, and people whispered of a *liaison* from which he could not immediately extricate himself.

“Our captain, however, replied a week afterward, with the announcement of his engagement. *Voilà tout!* You all know the rest. We are present to-day at the sad termination of the affair. The little Von Hegebach was a charming woman! It is deplorable!” he concluded, pathetically.

Frau von Ratenow, from the Burg, had been with the young mother to the last, and had also done the honor in the house of mourning. The families were distantly related.

The parents of the young wife were no longer living, but her guardian had arrived in the morning for the funeral;

the officers and principal men of the place had appeared, and the band of the regiment had marched before the flower-covered casket, through the winding streets, and played "Jesus, my Hope." The widower had followed the hearse in full uniform; no sign of grief was seen in his face; instead of that, however, there was an expression of bitter contempt; it was as though the lips under the gray beard were ready to break into a scornful smile.

Then that was over. Everybody was gone. One more mound of fresh earth in the church-yard. The drive-way to the desolate house was again deserted; only one carriage, with superb black horses, stood before the door.

In the dead mother's room, the basket-cradle, with the sleeping child, was being slowly rocked; an old servant, her eyes red with weeping, sat by it with idle hands. She had already covered up the simple furniture; the dainty table-scarf, and the flowers in the window had disappeared; the curtains and rugs were put away, and now it looked uninhabited and forsaken, as if the occupant had set out on a long, long journey.

Frau von Ratenow had gone into the captain's dark, uncomfortable living-room; she had already put on her bonnet and cloak.

"Good-bye, Hegebach!" she said; "I must go home now; they have just sent for me. Moritz has come, and everything has been topsy-turvy at the house for the last week. I do not need to assure you that the little girl shall have the best of care."

He had been standing by the window, looking out into the narrow street; but now he turned around, and looked with astonishment at the handsome, resolute woman.

"Well," she continued, "she is here, and needs care and attention; no little baby could thrive in your smoky rooms. I do it from love of her mother, for I am no longer accustomed to young children. Moritz is over twenty years old."

"I thank you, madame," he murmured; "indeed, I did not know—"

"Oh! say no more, dear Hegebach. I only wanted to say to you—to beg of you—that you should not bear a grudge against the little creature, because she can not have your uncle's money-bags. 'Man proposes, God disposes.' Who knows what the good of it is!"

"My cousin is to be married next month, madame."

"Well, let him marry," was the reply. "If the wished-for son comes to him, then the inheritance is his; we knew all that long ago."

"And the child!" he cried, breaking out in the first wild expression of pain, and violently tearing off his uniform. "If it had not been I, Lisa would still be living—if it had not been I, a son might have lain in the cradle! Who am I, that I should stretch out my hand to grasp at happiness?"

"Hegebach!" exclaimed Frau von Ratenow, reproachfully.

"A poor girl," he muttered, with intense bitterness. "What that means nowadays, in our position, you know as well as I."

"Bad enough, truly! She can get along as well as other poor girls, however. She must learn to work; she has two dear, healthful little hands and two bright eyes. What shall you call her?" she concluded, quietly. "Shall she have her mother's name—Elizabeth?"

He nodded, and turned toward the window.

"Good-bye, Hegebach. Do you not wish to see the little girl once, at least?"

He pressed his forehead against the window-pane, and motioned hastily in the negative.

"Well, I hope that this child may become a blessing to you, Hegebach—that you may yet thank Heaven upon your knees for this consolation which has been sent you. It might have been your recompense."

She went into the next room, her face still flushed with excitement.

“Take up the child, Siethmann; we are going now;” and, followed by the old nurse, who carefully carried the well wrapped-up child, she got into the carriage.

She did not have far to go; down the road, past the old Rath-haus, whose walls still bore traces of the Thirty Years’ War, in the shape of iron cannon-balls; through a couple of crooked streets and an ancient gate, then along by the town wall, over which rose the tops of fruit-trees in full bloom, along a lovely linden avenue, and straight up to a hospitably open trellised gate which allowed one a glimpse of the front of a high massive building, with a huge, peaked, tiled roof, overgrown with moss and gray with age.

This large brick house, whose solid walls lay as if embedded in the lap of the gnarled lindens and alders which had again thrown a veil of light green leaves over their venerable heads, was flooded with golden sunshine as the carriage rolled into the court, as if to welcome the little baby upon its entrance into the house to which pity and sympathy had brought it to find a home.

With a jolt, the carriage stopped before the imposing entrance, and a young, strikingly tall man, evidently in traveling-dress, sprung down the steps, impetuously tore open the door and kissed both hands of the lady who alighted.

“Mother, if I had had any idea,” he said; “but it was impossible to attend the funeral in this dress. Ah! you merciful soul! But what is that?”—interrupting himself, and motioning to the woman who had now stepped out with the child in her arms.

“Lisa’s little child, Moritz. For Heaven’s sake! you will drop it!”

But the young man with the fair, handsome face had

already taken the little bundle in his arms and carried it into the house, followed by the two women.

“Good gracious!” he cried, when he had reached the pleasant living-room, looking at the tiny face as tenderly as a veritable foster-mother, “how it looks, mother; so little and wrinkled. My poor, good Lisa,” and he hastily turned away to the window so that no one might see the tears in his eyes. “There it is, mother,” he continued, “if you had not persuaded Lisa when the gloomy captain came to woo her, she would have been living now!”

“Moritz, you are a monster!” replied Frau von Rate-now, and took the child from his arms. “You ought to be ashamed of yourself! For whom should the girl have waited? The boy has tears in his eyes! I have no patience with this lamenting afterward with ‘if’ and ‘but.’ Lisa has fulfilled her destiny; let her rest.”

“And the child is to remain with us?”

“Really, Moritz,” answered his mother. “Where else should she go?”

“That is so good of you,” he said, and threw his arm about the dignified woman, “so good, as only you know how to be!”

“No nonsense, Moritz, you know I am not given to sentiment,” was the quiet response; “your father had that sort of a disposition and you have inherited it. What? You have paid out so much money again just to see your mother and your home. You bad boy, you!”

She tried hard to make it appear as if she depreciated his praises, but she did not succeed; the mother love shone too powerfully in the eyes which gazed at her only son.

“You have struck it, mother, I had time enough and knew very well you would not be angry with me.”

“Such confidence,” she said, smiling; “how well you know me; but now we must look after the little one. What do you think, Moritz, I am going to get your Aunt Lotte to take charge of her.”

"What!" he exclaimed, astonished and still amused, "then I must be present! Give me the little lady, I'll carry her up-stairs—I must see that!"

Aunt Lotte was the cousin and adopted sister of Frau von Ratenow and canoness of Z., but she always lived at the Burg, with the exception of eight weeks in the year which she was obliged to spend at Z., according to the rulers of the order, unless she wished to forfeit her position. She was a quiet, not too intelligent creature, delicate, pale, and slightly given to literature, and consequently an entire contrast to Frau von Ratenow, although they had spent their lives together from their earliest childhood. Aunt Lotte undertook everything enthusiastically, she lived and moved in poetry, in higher spheres "high above all earthly dust." She read everything that fell into her hands, and the more affecting and heart-rending the story, the better she liked it. She knew "Die bezauberte Rose" by heart, from the beginning to the end, and when she began the last verse, her emotion had reached the highest pitch.

"Und mir ist nichts aus finer zeit geblieben
Als nur dies Lied, mein Leiden und mein Lieben."

This was only sighed, not spoken.

Fate had once shown her a white ticket in the lottery of life, but she had drawn a black one; she had "a grave" in her heart, as she was in the habit of assuring her friends.

Notwithstanding all this, the two had always lived happily together. When the practical cousin married Herr von Ratenow Lotte remained with the lonely parents, and after their death she came to the Burg and took possession of a couple of pleasant rooms in an upper story of the roomy house, in which everything was so old-maidenishly neat, people were half afraid to step on the polished wax floor.

A purring cat lay on the window-bench behind the snowy white curtains, the brass doors of the porcelain stove shone like pure gold, a spinning-wheel, decorated with

gorgeous bows, stood in the corner by the sofa, and the cabinet was crammed full of various kinds of little figures of by-gone times, the chief of which was a Chinaman of Meissen ware, who could wag his head for hours at a time. It was immensely valuable, as Aunt Lottie assured those who admired it. She was sitting by the window, reading a Psalm; she wore a black gown and black silk apron, for she had sincerely loved the young Frau von Hegebach.

Scarcely a year ago, in this very room, the girl, weeping and trembling, had laid her hand in that of her elderly *fiancé*, whom she had met while paying a visit at the Burg, as the Von Ratenow manor-house was called. They had played whist together and he had been disagreeable because she had made a mistake. A week later his trailing sword clattered over the staircase at the Burg; he had come courting, "*en grande tenue*." For two hours he sat in the drawing-room, (looking at Lisa, who finally fled in fear and trembling), then laid his suit before Frau von Ratenow, who at last said, "Wait, Hegebach, I will speak to the little maiden." She went up to Aunt Lotte's sitting-room, where the little one, weeping and frightened, had sunk in a heap on the dais, while Aunt Lotte was trying in vain to calm the excited nerves with the aid of *eau-de-Cologne* and valerian drops; for this wooing had been to her like a thunder-bolt out of a clear sky. After another hour she was engaged, but before that the deep voice of the hostess might have been heard as far off as the first floor; indeed, Moritz, who was then at home for a visit, always maintained that he distinctly heard such words as these — "proper match" — "pretensions" — "wait for what?"

Now Moritz von Ratenow carried the little daughter into the room in which the mother had struggled and combated, and without a word laid her in Aunt Lotte's lap.

"There, auntie, now you have got something for puss to be jealous of."

“Merciful Heaven!” she exclaimed, and her eyes glanced from the child through the cheerful room and remained fixed upon the pale, earnest face of Frau von Ratenow.

“You have the most time, Lotte; you take the child; I have brought her nurse, old Siethmann, with me; you shall have as little trouble as possible. It could not be left with him—for it has not yet learned to smoke cigars—and you know I could not undertake the care, with the housekeeping.”

During the conversation, the delicate hands of the maiden lady had been laid on the little bundle; she did not speak, she could not, her face was drawn with weeping, but she nodded her acquiescence so energetically, as she fervently wiped her eyes, that her answer was well understood.

Then at his mother’s desire, Moritz moved the cabinet aside, disclosing a door, which, when it was opened gave a glimpse of a pretty blue-papered bedroom, which had always been used as a guest chamber, but was now to become the nursery.

Moritz carried the cradle upstairs, and as it had grown dark Aunt Lotte sat down with her knitting, and young Herr von Ratenow settled himself on a stool at her feet. While she gently rocked the cradle, they talked earnestly together in subdued tones about the young mother, and were so absorbed in their conversation that neither of them perceived the head of Frau von Ratenow as she peered through the door at the strange pair.

The gray cat had jumped up into the cradle and was washing her paw.

“A wonderful boy,” murmured his mother, as she went down the stairs, “a man with the heart of a child—exactly like his father—naturally, he doesn’t get it from me,” and she pulled the keys out of her belt with so much energy that the jingling was heard by the maids in the kitchen, who were gossiping with each other over the events of the day,

and warned them to hurry to their work, as madame understood no jokes.

CHAPTER II.

So the child grew, in the old house shaded by the lindens, the house which was built from the ruins and over the foundations of an old castle which had been burned by the Swedes in the Thirty Years War. A solid, giant-like tower still stood in the garden, and around it a wall and a moat which in the spring time was one mass of blue violets; and there was still the deep old well and a dungeon, besides many a gruesome tale of apparitions which had appeared in the old days. For a long time now the place had been in the possession of the Von Ratenows, and had come to them first through a marriage; a Ratenow had, many years before, wedded a Burgsdorf, the last of her race.

When the clear eyes of the child looked from the windows, they beheld the immense court with its stables and barns, and far off the irregular roofs and high towers of the town. Near the Rath-haus tower, under a tall, peaked gable roof there lived a lonely man, and when any one asked the two-year-old baby, "Who lives over yonder?" she would take her finger out of her mouth, point across, and answer with brightening eyes "Papa!"

Truly, papa—the father who hardly knew his child, who only occasionally paid a duty visit at the Burg and looked at the little golden head as gloomily as if he had been presented with a dunning letter. Nevertheless the child shouted in her gayest tones as she ran to meet him, seizing his bright buttons wishfully.

There must have been something in the little heart that drew it toward the silent embittered man without the least misgiving. She was a strikingly beautiful child, the darling of the whole house, the heart and soul of Aunt Lotte, the gray cat and tall Moritz. Only with Aunt Ratenow

was she shy: the blooming face would grow white as wax beneath a condemning look from those clear eyes. She sprung and ran just as quickly to pick up anything which Aunt Ratenow had dropped, but she did not do it with such smiling readiness, even though the thanks were no less kindly spoken.

“Now she must soon go to school,” said Frau von Ratenow one day as she sat in the window, and with her eyes followed the child, who, with flying curls, ran across the court and disappeared in the cow-stable, where she was accustomed to go every afternoon for warm milk; “she will be five years old in April,” and she pushed her spectacles, which she had worn for two years, up on her forehead, that she might see better.

“To school?” asked Moritz, at home for the Easter holidays, and who was walking up and down through the room, in gray summer attire: he was as tall as a giant, with a saucy mustache hiding his upper lip and as handsome as ever. “To school?” he asked, standing before his mother.

Frau von Ratenow looked at him.

“Of course I know, mother dear, that she must learn to read and write, but why not here at home? There are plenty of governesses.”

The work sunk in her lap, and her clear eyes were filled with astonishment.

“Moritz, I do not see how you can think of such a thing! If I had had a daughter of my own, perhaps—I say ‘perhaps’—I might have chosen that exclusive manner of educating her. This child would only be spoiled by it; and—Heaven forgive us!—she will be that soon enough.”

“Then must the little creature paddle all that long way to school through every kind of wind and weather? At least, mother, let her be driven in, in winter.”

“As if I were a fool, Moritz,” she responded, quietly. “If you wish to provide a carriage for her later, it is

nothing to me. From April on Elsie will go to school; what is it anyway; down the avenue, through the Steintor, into the Rosengasse, and—she is there.”

“It is for you to decide, mother.”

“Right, my son; and now let us speak of your own plans; when you come back in the autumn from your journey to Vienna and the Tyrol are we to rule here together?”

He laughed, and kissed the hand which she held out to him.

“I hope you don’t yet think of marrying?” she said suddenly, and looked at the young man searchingly.

“Yes, mother,” he replied, coming toward her, “I will confess to you, frankly. I—have thought of it.”

“You fledgeling! but it will not amount to much! Whom have you chosen, then, child?”

“An old flame, mother dear; but do not be uneasy, she is only just going to town to boarding-school.”

“Ah! boarding-school? What will she gain there, Moritz? She will learn to be pale and white; to be a nervous doll, who can never become a strong wife and mother; and as for what she will forget, you have probably not reflected upon that? All taste for a quiet, family life goes—pfui—out of the window. You should not let her go, Moritz, if you wish to have any good of her.”

Moritz certainly looked perplexed for a moment. That his mother should in an instant comprehend the case struck him and pleased him at the same time. He walked through the room a couple of times with his hands behind his back. In the meanwhile Frau von Ratenow knitted calmly on her stocking, looking out into the court from time to time. She always sat there in the afternoon between four and six o’clock; aside from this she allowed herself little rest.

“Hegebach is going to leave the army, Moritz; did you know it?” she asked after awhile.

"It is the best thing for him, he will never get any further," replied her son; "he is always quarreling with his superior officers."

"But the small pension!"

"Well! he can live upon it, mother."

"He! he! But his daughter?" rang out, impatiently.

"Oh, mother!"

"Gracious! yes, Moritz. You talk of marrying! When you have half a dozen children where shall I get the money for Elsie?" She had spoken facetiously, and neither of them could help laughing.

"You dearest mother!" he exclaimed, still laughing, and kissed her lips.

"No; joking aside," she protested, defending herself, "I shall look after Elsie, you need not fear that I will only half do the thing. She must study hard; I think she will become a governess; and as soon as she is ten years old I shall take her to D——; that will be the best thing for her; don't you think so, Moritz?"

At this moment the door was softly unlatched and a little head with hair like shining gold peered into the room; a pair of big brown eyes looked out of the rosy, smiling face, and a little voice that was clear as a lark's pleaded, "Moritz, Moritz, will you come into the garden? There is a squirrel in the chestnut-tree."

"Come here, Elsie," called the young man; and as the little one sprung toward him he took her up in his arms as if she were a doll and carried her to his mother.

"Look at her, mother," he entreated, in a singularly tender tone.

She looked at the innocent, childish face and then glanced up at him questioningly.

"Now run along, Elsie, I will come in a moment," and the fair young giant carefully opened the door, that the little creature might run out.

"Isn't she as fresh as a rose-bud, so bright and merry?"

he said as he came back. "And will you shut her up in a gloomy school-room in the sweetest part of her girlhood, where she would only pine away with the hard work? See, mother, I can not rest for thinking of it; what a world of tears and sleepless nights, of buried hopes and bitter renunciations are summed up in that one expression, 'She must be a governess!' Oh! mother, don't allow it, don't imprison her, poor little girl!"

"Oh, Moritz, how you do go on! it is hardly to be believed," responded Frau von Ratenow impatiently, and turning slightly pale, "as if I were on the point of doing the child a great wrong. Give her an allowance, if you are able. Do you know that she has nothing besides her mother's three hundred thalers and a few little trinkets? Hegebach will leave nothing but debts behind him when he closes his eyes, and what then? Besides, it is still far off, Moritz; and you don't need to pity your rose-bud beforehand. I will forgive you for the comparison, my dear boy, as you are in love. What is that? *She* is certainly a rose-bud also," and with these words she threw her knitting energetically into her basket and hurried out of the room. Immediately afterward her son heard her resonant voice sounding from the cellar, "I will show you that it can be done. Where there is a will, there is a way!"

Late in the evening Moritz von Ratenow knocked at the door of his mother's sleeping-room.

"I heard you ride into the court," she called. "Come in. Where have you been?"

He crossed the threshold and stepped cautiously up to the canopied bed. The full moon shone through the arched window, making every object distinct in the familiar old room. How long it was since he had been here! There hung his father's portrait over the bureau, and below it his likeness as a boy; here stood the old cabinet in which the mother preserved all her relics—her bridal-wreath, and his first little cap; his father's spurs and

sword, and the last bunch of field flowers which he had gathered for her the day before his death. And here was still the delicate fragrance of lavender; it seemed to him for an instant as if he were again a little boy, and had come to his mother to confess some childish folly.

“What is it, my boy?” she asked in her soft Bremen dialect. “Where have you been?”

He sat down abruptly on the edge of the bed and took her hand. “Guess,” he said, hesitatingly. “But no, you could not guess. I have been to Teesfeld at—my father-in-law’s.”

“Oh! you wretched man!” exclaimed Frau von Rate-now.

“It was only on account of the boarding-school, mother. I said to him that I loved Frieda and she loved me, and if Herr von Teesfeld had no objection to our marrying, then—”

“And he had no objections? Naturally!” she inquired with an imperceptible tinge of pride.

“Heaven forbid, mother! No, in a word, Frieda shall leave the boarding-school.”

“How old is she then, Moritz?”

“Sixteen years and a half. Frau von Teesfeld insisted that we should wait four years.”

“Very sensible, Moritz.”

“Are you contented, then, mother?” he asked, tenderly.

“Ah! what good would it do me to oppose it? She comes of a good family, Moritz; the connection is suitable, and if she takes after her father she will be an honest woman.”

She stopped as if she were meditating.

“I have been too thoughtless; if I had had any idea that the child was to be my daughter-in-law—yet it seems as if her father had once said to me, ‘Frieda has just such a changeable little head as her mother’s.’ Precisely! I

recollect it distinctly. Now understand, if it is to be so, keep a tight rein from the first, since you will have much to learn."

He laughed. "She is fascinating, mother, just because she is such a witch."

"There is nothing to laugh at, Moritz," she complained. "But now go to bed. To-morrow I will drive over to Teesfeld. As your mother I must try to be agreeable to her, mustn't I?" and she stroked his fair hair caressingly. "Go to bed now, don't gaze at the moon any more to-night, do you hear, Moritz?"

After he was gone she sat up in bed for a long time with folded hands. "I am glad that he is so resolute," she said at last, under her breath, "when his father wooed me he stirred up the whole family; it was the talk of the county. The boy knows what he wants—he gets that from me!"

CHAPTER III.

THE door of the old stucco house, whose windows gazed so wearily upon the unchanging monotony of the narrow street, was softly unlatched and the slight figure of a little girl about ten years of age passed quickly in. The child wore a simple gray woolen frock and a brown straw hat with brown ribbons, under which two heavy braids of fair hair were conspicuous. In one hand she held carefully a basket filled with pears and grapes as she ran quickly and, in spite of the little thick boots, almost noiselessly, up the wooden stairs and tapped at a door at the top.

"Come in," called a man's voice; and the next moment Elsie von Hegebach stood before her father in the room, which was blue with tobacco smoke.

The man had grown very old, and looked neglected in the faded dressing-gown which he had taken to wearing since he had been pensioned. He had grown yellow, and

every bitter feature of his face had become more domineering; but in spite of everything the rosy cheek of the child was pressed confidingly against her father's.

"Papa, how do you feel?" she inquired, hastily setting the basket on the table and throwing her arms around his neck.

"Don't ask me such a question," was the ill-humored reply.

A shadow passed over the child's smiling countenance. "Papa, may I stay with you a little while?" she begged, "or are you going to the club?"

"You know very well that I am going to the club; but Siethmann is in the other room."

"Dear papa"—the corners of the little rosy mouth were drawn down, but the tears were bravely suppressed—"I will go away directly; but you know I must say 'good-bye' to-day—to-morrow I am going to D——."

"To-morrow?" he asked, looking up from his newspaper, "when do you start?"

"Frau Cramm said that I must be at her house at seven o'clock in the morning. Aunt Ratenow asked Frau Cramm to take me with her. Annie is coming to D—— too, because Moritz's wedding is to-day, and they are all in Teesfeld, and nobody can go with me, so—"

"Yes, yes," he interrupted, impatiently, "it is a very good arrangement; the term probably begins day after to-morrow?"

"Yes, papa! Shall I read the newspaper a little to you, papa?"

"Thank you, no! Well, I hope you will have a pleasant journey, Elsie; be a good girl!" he held his hand out to her, and turned again to his paper. The child stood perfectly motionless, her pallid lips moved gently, but no word crossed them, only gradually the sweet light in her eyes gave place to an expression of utter amazement. She turned around and went out of the room. "Elsie!"

sounded behind her; she started with fear. "Give that trash to Siethmann, I don't eat such things," and he pointed to the dainty little basket.

She threw her suddenly upon her knees before the morose, ill-natured man. "Papa! papa!" she cried, "why don't you love me? Why don't you ever speak so kindly to me as Annie's father does to her?"

Her whole body trembled; she clung to him in passionate grief with her blonde head against him and burst into sobs.

"Good heavens, Elsie, get up," exclaimed old Siethmann, who had come in on hearing the cry, and she drew the half struggling child up into her arms, at the same time casting a severe look at the major. He had sprung up and was pacing to and fro through the room in nervous excitement.

"What is the matter with you?" he asked, half-anxious, half-provoked, "has any one scolded you? What is it? Tell me? If you are ill, Siethmann shall go with you and put you to bed."

"I am not ill," she answered, softly. "Good-bye, papa!"

And, hastily drying her eyes, she went out of the room into the one which had once been her mother's, but which Siethmann had occupied since she had been the major's housekeeper.

The child sat quietly by the window and looked into the neglected garden. She had been altogether too sad for a couple of weeks now. Since Aunt Ratenow had sent for her one day to come to her room, and had said to her—deed, what had she said?

"Elsie," she had begun, stroking the child's soft hair, "you are ten years old, and a sensible little girl, and now it is time for me to talk with you about serious matters. See, everybody who wishes to be happy must make himself of some use in the world, and you

do that in the future, also; do not you? There are many who, so to speak, are born with a silver spoon in the mouth, and through all the days of their lives have no care, are not obliged to ask, What shall we eat; what shall we drink; wherewithal shall we be clothed? Others, during their whole existence, must do nothing but try to answer these questions, and that is far from being the worst of it; for it says in the Bible that 'their strength is but labor and sorrow.'

"Your father, Elsie, is a lonely, sick man, who has had much trouble in his life, and he is a poor man; he can not give you a silver spoon; but, instead of that, God gave you a clear intellect and a strong, healthy body. It will be easy for you to answer the questions about which I spoke just now if you have an honest desire to do so.

"I want to impress it upon you, Elsie, to be diligent, and to work faithfully to pass the examinations and be fitted for a governess. That is almost the only path open to a young lady in which she can make her own way in the world."

It seemed to the child as if a thick, dark veil had been suddenly thrown over all the brightness of her life. The gray school-room appeared before her eyes with its stifling air, the windows through which a sunbeam so rarely fell, and with its walls ready to crush her to death. And she was to be imprisoned there—she, who so dearly loved the flowers, the air, and the sunshine—imprisoned, not till she grew up; no, but forever, forever! It was an impossibility!

"Well, Elsie, have you no inclination for it?"

She not only shook her head, her whole body shuddered with horror.

"Then you will remain a little know-nothing. You will be something like Siethmann, and a person who has nothing is treated accordingly."

"Why must I?" she had cried out. "All the other children don't have to do it;" and the big brown eyes

looked into the serious face of the stately woman as though they were begging for the explanation of an incomprehensible enigma.

“ Oh! many must do it, Elsie, and you too. It is my duty so to educate you that you may be independent. Now you may go. You know that you must be obedient, Elsie, even though you do not yet understand the reason for it.”

After that she had gone to Aunt Lotte, pale, and with quickened breath.

“ I must go away, auntie!”

She was not able to say any more then. She glanced around the familiar room, and then fastened her eyes upon her good old friend. There she saw tears falling upon the fine wrinkles and lines of the face, and dropping on the cap-ribbons, and she was so frightened that she could not cry.

She must go away for such an endless time—away from the home of her childhood, from the shady garden, from Moritz—away from all!

Yesterday, weeping, Aunt Lotte had packed her box, and she had said “ Good-bye ” to her, to Aunt Ratenow, and to dear, dear Moritz; for in the afternoon they had all gone to Teesfeld for the wedding eve. Aunt Lotte had even taken her gray silk gown from the wardrobe, and to that extent had mounted Pegasus for the occasion. Elsie knew the marriage poem by heart; it bore some resemblance to “ Die Bezauberte Rose,” and dwelt largely upon “ Cupid,” “ chains of roses,” and “ love’s enchantment.” Oh! to be at a wedding! it must be glorious. She wanted so much to go with them, but Aunt Ratenow would not allow it on account of this journey to school.

“ Why do you want to go, Elsie?” she said. “ At such a time children are only in the way.”

Now she had been alone all day long, even puss had gone on a promenade over the roofs. What good had it

done her that at noon the housekeeper had brought her a glass of wine and a piece of cake for luncheon?

“From Herr Moritz, Elsie. He charged me not to forget it,” she explained.

For the first time she felt the pain of loneliness, the deep, ardent longing for a heart that was wholly and entirely her own and to which she had an inviolable claim; and so she had run to her father.

Now she sprung up suddenly; she could not bear it any longer in the close, uncomfortable, deserted-looking room; it was full of the odor of bad coffee; there were spots of oil upon the floor, and on the wall hung the wardrobe of the old housekeeper. The simple mahogany furniture was worn, and the sofa dilapidated from moth-holes and hard usage. She ran down the stairs as if she were pursued, hurried through a couple of streets, and did not once stop till she stood, all out of breath, by the ivy-covered grave of the mother whom she had never known.

The September day was drawing to an end, dark clouds had settled down in the west, and the evening wind cooled the tearful little face.

“My mamma,” she said, in a whisper; there was an indescribable sound of woe in those two words, and she sunk down and pressed her cheek against the simple cross.

She still sat there when the grave-digger’s wife came over, and kindly told her that she must go now; the church-yard would be closed directly.

She quickly picked up a couple of ivy-leaves before she left the grave.

And then—until late in the night—she stood at Aunt Lotte’s window, and listened to the shouts and songs of the men and maids who drank punch in the servants’ hall, and celebrated their master’s marriage.

The following morning, about eight o’clock, as the sun with great difficulty struggled through the clouds, he saw a white, childish face that looked with great, questioning

eyes out of the window of a carriage that was rolling along a country road.

In the inside sat a plump, blooming woman in a black velvet mantle, and a well-dressed little man; while between them they had their flaxen-haired, flat-nosed daughter whom they were taking to the renowned institute at D—— for a year or two.

Each of the parents held one of the little hands, and it could easily be seen in the mother's eyes how bitterly she had wept.

Elsie sat alone on the back seat, close to a lot of packages, and before the child's spirit was stretched out a dark and dreary vision of the unknown life in which the little feet were taking their first steps to-day.

CHAPTER IV.

EIGHT years had rolled away since that time, and not without leaving traces upon the people in the little town in the Prussian province of the Mark.

Major von Hegebach still sat smoking and reading in his uncomfortable room in the Rosengasse, and the old Siethmann still made her detestable coffee; but the major no longer went to the club so regularly as of old; he had grown lame, and it hurt him to walk; the fatal gout had taken away the one distraction which he had had until now, and his temper was not at all improved by it.

Old Siethmann had a harder time than formerly, but she did not perceive it; for she had grown duller than ever, and aside from her coffee-pot there was hardly anything which interested her in the whole world, perhaps with the exception of Elsie.

Regularly every four weeks a letter had lain on the old man's desk; the handwriting had changed by degrees from a child's awkward attempts, to a fine, elegant, but not characterless woman's hand.

He had only answered once, and that was when Elsie was confirmed, and even then the letter had lain in a box with a plain necklace of glowing garnets—the one ornament which her dead mother had possessed.

Thereupon there had come a deeply grateful letter, with the childish promise always to try to be an obedient daughter to the beloved father.

Now, to-day, another little letter lay before him.

“MY DEAR, DEAR PAPA,—You shall be the first to know that I have passed the examination at the head of the class and am Number 1. The principal first sent for me, and told me. I am so glad and so happy about it, and all the hard work is forgotten. I am coming now in a few days, dear papa, and I am so rejoiced in the thought of seeing you again.

“Your loving daughter,

“ELSIE.”

He had read the letter again and again, with his face growing more and more serious.

But while he was yet meditating two old hands were busily occupied at the Burg adorning the room for her darling's home-coming.

Aunt Lotte and Aunt Ratenow had received this same joyful news by the second mail, and the former had immediately begun to arrange the nursery for the young girl, who, of course, would come back to her old room. Downstairs, in Frau von Ratenow's living-room, there had been little change in the course of the years, only she herself had grown slightly more corpulent, and her face showed a trifle more plainly the expression of an inflexible will, and alert, energetic readiness.

And yet there was something new here that gave to the comfortable room, with its thick, soft carpet, its heavy blue curtains, and the glittering brass ornaments, an indescribably cozy, home-like air.

Three children were playing on the floor before the fireplace in which an autumn fire was blazing—a boy and two girls; two fair-haired little maidens, with rosy complexions and an undeniable resemblance to their father, and a dark-eyed boy, the youngest of all. There was such shouting and tittering there as would have made the ears of any one but a grandmother ache.

Frau von Ratenow, however, did not appear to hear it; she had just been reading a letter, had let it drop, and then had taken it up and read it again.

“Lulu!” she called, “go and bring your papa to me.”

The eldest, a slender maiden of five years, sprung up and ran quickly out of the room. A moment afterward, a small, infinitely elegant figure, dressed in black, pushed aside the blue *portière*, and, strolling into the room, was greeted by the children with loud cries of “Mamma! mamma!”

“Bless your little hearts!” she said, kissing them; and then turning to Frau von Ratenow with both animation and curiosity, “Moritz will be here directly, mamma. What is it, then?”

“Is your name ‘Moritz,’ little inquisitive one?” she questioned, not unkindly, but at the same time not very cordially.

But the little creature did not allow herself to be discouraged; breaking into a laugh, she wound her arms around the old lady’s neck.

“Oh, mamma, you know very well that I am frightfully curious; but, anyway, it is not a question of state secrets? Please, please let me stay!”

“Frieda! I wonder if you will ever have any sense! Will you always remain a child? But that is only natural, when Moritz humors you in everything.”

She was, however, created to be petted, this fascinating little creature, with the exquisite figure, the refined oval face, the dark blue eyes under long black lashes, and the

glossy blue-black hair which, simply arranged, allowed the beautiful shape of her head to be seen. No wonder that the "boy," as his mother called him, was still as deeply in love as on his wedding-day!

"Well, of course," he said, on coming in, as if he were angry, but with brightening eyes, "here she is again, just to find out what it is all about!"

"I don't know yet, anyway, Moritz."

"That is certainly very sad, little wife. Be quiet, you youngsters!" he called, covering up his ears. "Who can hear a word? Run along quickly to Karoline."

In the meantime Frau von Ratenow had given the letter to her son.

"Elsie has passed her examination, and comes on Tuesday," she observed.

"Oh, really?" exclaimed the young man, rejoiced. "Thank goodness! She will be glad to turn her back on the school-room."

"I only wanted to ask you, Moritz, what is to be done with her now?"

His good, honest eyes were filled with astonishment.

"Nothing at all for the present, mother. I think the poor thing ought to have a good rest. She must certainly need a little change and recreation."

Frau von Ratenow nodded.

"Very well; but you will only make the return to her father's house so much the harder for her."

"Yes, Moritz, you will only spoil her by it," agreed the young wife.

"Heavens! the poor child! What can she do with the old bear?" fell compassionately from the man's lips.

"It is her duty to take care of her father; the man is certainly failing, Moritz, and Siethmann grows older and more untidy every day."

"To be sure you are right, mother," he interrupted, "but not just yet; we have not had time enough to consider

that. The house must, at the least, be put in order so that it may be a fit abode for human beings; if I had thought of it, it might have been done long ago, but as it now is, I will not take the girl there. She will stay here the first fortnight, so don't say anything against it."

"So far as that point we are agreed," said the old lady.

"And we have decided for the best, mother!"

There was a short pause during which only the clicking of the knitting-needles was heard.

"It is two years to-day since the Bennewitzer met with that calamity with his sons," the young man began, at last, "it is terrible to lose two children at once."

"It is horrible!" assented the young wife: "I do not yet understand how it could happen."

"Very simply, Frieda. The two boys went out sailing alone on the Elbe; a sudden gust of wind must have overturned the boat; the bodies were not found until the following day."

"Yes, that is hard," observed Frau von Ratenow and she involuntarily wiped her eyes with her handkerchief.

"It is just four years since his wife died!" She let her hands drop suddenly into her lap and gazed before her meditatively; finally she said, with her face flushing deeply: "Now if only Elsie could—the man is rich and is all alone—"

"Indeed, the thought has also passed through my mind," returned Moritz; "nevertheless, as daughters are absolutely cut off from the inheritance, according to the will of the dead uncle, and as the Bennewitzer is by no means an old man, one can hardly doubt that he will marry again, and—"

"The beggar's bread always falls out of his pocket; it is an old story, my boy," interrupted Frau von Ratenow, who had fully recovered her balance; "I must invite him here some time: I found his card only a little while ago."

"Do you know the Bennewitzer Hegebach very well,

mamma?" asked the younger woman. "I have never cared much for him myself, but my sister Lili likes him immensely," she prattled on; "he is a distinguished-looking man and certainly bears no resemblance to his cousin; further than that I can not say."

Frau von Ratenow made no reply.

"Moritz," she asked, "how are the roads to-day?"

"Good and hard, mother, the rain scarcely penetrated two inches."

"Then I beg that you will excuse me, I am going out."

She arose and, bowing pleasantly to the young couple, went to her adjoining bedroom.

"Where are you going, mother?" asked Moritz.

"Mamma, in a quarter of an hour I am to drive to Frau von Keyser's!" called Frieda, at the door, "if you could wait so long?"

"Thank you, no, children, I prefer to walk," was her answer; but in reply to their question "Where to?" they heard nothing.

It had already grown dark as Frau von Ratenow returned, and, walking up the stairs, knocked at Aunt Lotte's door, then immediately entered.

The old lady sat at the window and was looking out into the autumnal garden; she had laid her book and knitting aside as she could no longer see in the twilight.

"No, Lotte, it is hardly credible!" said Frau von Ratenow, sitting down on the first chair she came to, as if out of breath.

Aunt Lotte was alarmed, her cousin so seldom lost her calm, reserved self-control.

"My dear Ratenow! for Heaven's sake what has happened?" she questioned, stepping down from the dais.

"No, Lotte! See! I have come to you because I can not talk it over with Moritz. What has happened? Now, you know that Elsie is coming the day after to-morrow; Moritz and I had different views about her future. I said

she ought to go to her father; he maintained that would be a cruelty, she ought to come here."

"And Frieda?" Aunt Lotte ventured to interrupt.

"Frieda? Frieda is not taken into consideration," she responded with a contemptuous accent. "She says one time *so*, and another time *so*, as it suits her for the moment; she has no judgment and never did have any. If she had wished to have theatricals and any one were lacking for a part for which Elsie was suited, she would have said, 'Oh! mamma, don't let her go to the quarrelsome old father!' and if we had been, accidentally, thirteen at the table, she would doubtless have declared, 'Ah! yes, mamma, the child belongs to her father!' only on account of the ominous number."

Frau von Ratenow was silent for a moment.

"In short," she continued, while she hurriedly unfastened her heavy silk mantle, "I set out and went to Hegebach; I hoped that he would himself feel the desire to take the child home, so that there might still be a little light upon his old days; and what do you think, Lotte?" she cried, with raised voice and letting her hands fall heavily upon the table. "He does not want her! Did you ever, except in your silly novels, find a father who would not receive his own child into his house? He was regularly vehement at the last, his whole body trembled, he talked of a young girl with her hundred thousand demands from life, and that he only longed for one thing now, for quiet, quiet, quiet!"

"But dear Ratenow, you vex yourself more than is necessary; he has always been so."

"For pity's sake," said the irritated woman, flying into a passion, "a body shall not be offended at that! he demonstrated to me minutely that he had no use for such an article of luxury as a grown-up daughter: he could hardly afford necessities: he had to pay off something every month on the old debts which he incurred when he was a lieutenant-

ant—who would undertake that after his death? He could have done no more toward her education than to give the three hundred thalers which Lisa brought to him; Elsie could now earn something with her learning—how many were obliged to do that—and so on.”

“The poor girl! the poor girl!” wailed Aunt Lotte, wiping her eyes.

“I told him my opinion, Lotte,” continued the excited woman, “and you know my words are not always steeped in honey.”

Aunt Lotte remained silent; she knew it only too well.

“At the last he grew calm and pale; but what good did it do? I meant well by him, but no one can compel another to be happy—”

“And now?”

“Ah! Now Moritz has his way,” was answered, with irritation.

“Oh, leave it alone, cousin,” said Aunt Lotte, appeasingly, her heart secretly exulting that her darling was coming back; “let it be, who knows how it will end, see—”

“I know well enough, Lotte,” broke in Frau von Rate-now; “it will be this way, a life of brilliant gayety—a neglect of everything serious, as is unfortunately the fashion with us now—and some day she will be obliged to go to work, for the ‘must’ will come, depend upon it, and perhaps before very long: but by that time she will have forgotten how to reconcile herself to it and to submit.”

“Ah! that is all in God’s hands, cousin! She might marry.”

“Will you provide her with a dowry, Charlotte?” she asked, scornfully, “if so, don’t make it too small.”

“Oh! this prose,” groaned Aunt Lotte, offended.

“With your poetry you can not bake a single loaf nor lay the table even once. The stomach is there, my good child, and one feels hunger even in the days of tenderest love—our young gentlemen of the present time know that

very well, and, more than that, they realize also that caviare tastes better than rice broth."

Aunt Lotte did not return a syllable to this bitter, realistic explanation. After a few moments of deep silence, she began timidly:

"Cousin, I have an idea. If you—no, if Moritz—Frieda said recently that she must have a governess—if now Elsie were to try for a time with the children, she would then have a serious occupation, and—" She ceased speaking and tried anxiously to catch a glimpse of her companion's features, in the dusk.

"That is—that would do, perhaps, Lotte," continued Frau von Ratenow, quietly, and arose. "That is certainly not a bad idea—really, I will immediately speak to—" She caught up her mantle and took it over her arm. "I will say to you, Lotte," turning around again at the door, "I much prefer to have the child near us, and also, that she should not be exactly a governess—but—don't mention that! Good-evening, Lotte!"

Then the door closed and the firm steps resounded and died away in the hall.

Aunt Lotte stood in the middle of her little room, shaking her head. Oh! this world became more prosaic every day!

CHAPTER V.

A DARK, cheerless October day was drawing to an end; through the heavy gray fog rushed a locomotive with red, glowing eyes, a long train of railway carriages behind it, blowing mighty clouds of steam into the white sea of mist; fog and smoke floated and twirled confusedly in wild, fantastic shapes, waved and curled and fluttered, then seemed to hang upon the branches of the pines, always finding new places in the incessant, dizzy, onward rush of the train.

A young girl stood at the window of the "Fräuen

coupé," so tall and slender that the ribbon bow on her simple straw hat was almost as high as the upper section of the window; she was the only occupant of the compartment on this wet autumn evening, but her young face showed no trace of frost or loneliness; her cheeks glowed with joyful excitement, the hazel eyes shone, and the small mouth broke occasionally into a smile, then again was for a moment half opened, as if in expectation of something wonderful, lending the face a sweet, child-like expression.

She went from one window to the other, but there was never anything to be seen but mist; the train ran insufferably slowly too, she thought. Probably for the twelfth time she took up her traveling bag and then laid it down again. How surprised they would all be! Moritz was to meet her at ten o'clock, and now it was only seven.

Her heart beat as if it would burst as she heard the long, sustained whistle of the locomotive, and then saw single lights slipping rapidly past the windows. What an age it was since she had been here! For the last two years and a half it had never been convenient for her to spend her holidays at the Burg; once they had all been away, another time the children had had the measles, and—

"Oh! there was the station! Elsie let down the window and leaned way-out in the cold, damp air; here was the well, there stood the old one-eyed porter, and here below, away off beyond the garden, the lights of the little town glimmered, orange-colored, through the smoke and fog. Oh! it is such bliss to come home from among strangers; to come home!

"Which way, fräulein?" asked the porter?

"Oh! It can stay here, they will send for it to-morrow from the Burg," she said hurriedly; "I came earlier—"

"Will you go all alone then?" It seemed cruel to the man not to earn anything.

It occurred to Elsie that Aunt Ratenow always thought

it improper for ladies to travel alone. "You may carry my bag; but hurry, please!"

She had already hastened on along the well-known, thinly built-up street as far as the Stadt-thor, and not until she had reached the Thorstrasse did her gasping companion overtake her. There stood the old Rath-haus tower, there were the slanting, crooked houses, and there too the wavering lanterns hanging from chains in the middle of the street; the house-bells rang just the same, and there in the shop where Moritz used sometimes to buy candy for her was the identical Moorish boy behind the window panes to show that good tobacco could be bought inside.

At last she stood still and gazed at a couple of dimly lighted windows; involuntarily she turned her steps aside to hurry up there—to papa. But Moritz had explicitly written that he and Aunt Ratenow wished to talk with her first—no, she must be obedient, and she slowly turned away.

"A fine, roundabout way, fräulein," grumbled her attendant. "You don't know the place very well."

She only nodded, smiling, and proceeded with flying steps out through the Steinthor into the linden avenue. Now she knew every gnarled trunk that lifted itself up black in the darkness. She knew the gleaming of the lamps over there and the barking of the watch-dog which sounded in her ear. Now, with palpitating heart, she leaned against the arch of the gate-way— It lay before her—the dear old house! Up there were Aunt Lotte's windows, brilliantly lighted, and underneath were those of Aunt Ratenow's room; the lamp was burning over the house-door and figures were moving behind the kitchen windows, and yonder the big carriage was being drawn out of the coach-house.

"You may go," she whispered to the man, taking the little sachel and laying a piece of money in his hand; then,

with ever swifter steps she ran to the entrance and stood in the vaulted vestibule. Where first? But she only hesitated an instant, then turned to the stairs; up there, in that bright little room, was her especial, her dearest home.

"Aunt Lotte!" she cried, on the threshold; as clear as a lark it sounded through the silent room.

"Elschen! darling!" rang back. Yes, she was once more at home; she was expected here. Oh! it is so lovely to come home!"

"Dear me! I should hardly have recognized you, Elsie; only the eyes are the same," cried Aunt Lotte, after she had released the girl from her arms.

"Dear auntie, I have grown, haven't I? But I am eighteen years old."

"Come, come! take off your mantle, there. Now here, see, the tea will be ready in a minute. Truly, eighteen years old, child! I have told you in your birthday poem what that means for one of us." And Aunt Lotte stood before the smiling, rosy maiden, with the tea-pot in her hand, and recited:

"Achtzehn Fahre! Lenzeszauber,
Der dich einmal nur begrüsst—
Halb erschloss'ne Rosenknospe,
Die die Frühlingssonne küsst—"

"Ah! auntie, life is so lovely!" interrupted the girl; "when I used to sit over my books until my head seemed so heavy that I could not do any more, then I would think of all the happiness which every one must experience, and upon my youth which lay before me. Sister Beate always said, Heaven had assured to each one a share of happiness. Oh, auntie! I do so rejoice in my portion; I could scarcely wait till I could get out of the school-room!"

Aunt Lotte hastily poured out the tea; she was all at once in a dream of spring-time and nightingale's songs; she had been young once, and there before her, in her little room, sat the embodiment of spring. How beautiful

the little Elsie had grown! With what a fresh, innocent face she gazed at life; how many, many buds of hope were blooming behind the smooth white forehead; what enchanted brightness lurked in the eyes and what joy in the heart. "Ah, happy youth!" whispered the old lady.

"Achtzehn Fahre! In's ärmste Leben
Streut es seine Freuden ein,
Füllt der Zukunft dunkle Thäler
Ganz mit goldnem Sonnenschein—"

And now the dear girl was here once more. She had worked hard for years; she had no home, no tender mother, no expectations for the future, and notwithstanding all, youth, which considered it her lawful right to be happy, to demand happiness, had raised her up to a genuine heaven. How long would it be before Aunt Ratenow would come with her garden shears, and in her terrible, realistic fashion, cut off one bud after the other. Aunt Lotte was obliged to turn away and set the tea-pot into the stove in order to master her tears.

"But now, auntie, how is everything here?" asked Elsie, quickly drinking her tea: "I must run down to see Aunt Ratenow and Moritz and Frieda."

"Yes, you must, child; yes, yes!" said the old lady. "Really you will see very little of Frieda, they are having rehearsals for theatricals down-stairs; they want to play something for Aunt Ratenow's birthday; but Moritz will certainly have a few minutes to spare."

"Rehearsals? Who?"

"Now, who? The officers from the town, child, and the young women. Every night there is a supper afterward, and the day before yesterday they even danced. Mercy on us! Elsie, I hear your aunt's step, and you have not been to see her yet."

"No, it is Moritz!" cried Elsie, and in an instant she was behind the stove and had drawn her skirts close around her slender figure. Yes, it was Moritz; he merely wished

to ask if Aunt Lotte would not be able to drive to the station to meet the little one. Frieda had half the town here again for supper. As he spoke he sunk down in the nearest chair, and pushed his hair back from his forehead as he often did when he wished to drive away unpleasant thoughts.

Suddenly two trembling little hands were laid over his eyes. "Uncle Moritz, who am I?" asked a dear, familiar voice, and a clear exhilarating laugh followed.

"You witch!" he cried, holding her fast and springing up. "Child, how you have grown!" His good face lighted up. "They could not have treated you very badly in D——, surely. And you don't look learned, either, thank Heaven."

"No, Moritz, I certainly have no talent for that. Just imagine, the professor assured me of the fact only yesterday," she said, dejectedly, but as he smiled, she added by way of consolation: "The examination, however, was brilliant!"

He kept looking at her. "Aunt Lotte, we are growing old; have I then"—and he made a rocking motion with his arms—"held that tall young lady so—and now?"

"Truly," answered Aunt Lotte, "as I suddenly saw her before me I thought of Schiller."

"And glorious in the pride of youth—"

"That is right, Lotte," broke in a voice, "fill her head with nonsense."

Aunt Ratenow was standing upon the threshold, as if produced by magic, and behind her appeared Frieda's laughing face.

"We want to see if it is true," she exclaimed. "Karine declared she had heard Elsie's voice up here, and positively here she is."

Elsie had just emerged from Aunt Ratenow's double shawl, which the old lady was accustomed to wrap about her in coming through the cold hall; now her lips were

impetuously kissed by the young woman. "Moritz, don't you see she comes as if she had been sent for? I have just received a note from Frau von D., saying she can not join us, as she is in mourning. Now we are out of our difficulty."

"What is the matter?" asked Frau von Ratenow, sharply.

"I have no time, mamma; I must go down-stairs, and you must not ask me anyway," called back Frieda. "Bring Elsie down with you when you come, Moritz!" and in a second the dainty figure in the heavy navy-blue silk gown had disappeared behind the door.

"Now, then, child," said Aunt Ratenow, addressing the young girl, "we have decided that you are to remain here for the present."

"Oh! how gladly—if papa will allow it," was the perfectly natural reply; "but then, aunt—"

"To be sure, he will allow it," interrupted the old lady. It sounded peculiarly, and Aunt Lotte and Moritz looked at each other. "And in order that you may—" she continued.

"We can talk about the rest to-morrow," interposed Moritz. "Mother, dear, do us the favor of taking supper with us this evening; Frieda would be so pleased."

"You know, Moritz, I can not endure so much talking," she responded. "Of course, it would be much pleasanter if we could be alone, but— Now please do it. Aunt Lotte and Elsie! Get ready for supper."

"Mother and auntie can excuse themselves early. Indeed, mother will be requested to do so."

Frau von Ratenow arose, shaking her head. "My faithful old birthday," she said, "that must now give a name for your festivities. Come for me, Moritz, when it is time—"

"Aunt Lotte," said Elsie, after she had made a slight alteration in her dress by fastening a knot of delicate rose-

colored ribbon on the simple black cashmere gown which was so becoming to her clear complexion and golden hair, "it seems so odd! Aunt Ratenow was out of humor, and so was Moritz—"

"Yes, but—I really do not know why," was the evasive reply. "Are you ready? It is high time."

Elsie was ready, and they went along the hall together, and down the stairs.

"Oh, Elsie! my handkerchief!" exclaimed Aunt Lotte, as they were on the point of entering the drawing-room. She was always forgetting something.

"You go in, auntie, I will fetch it," said the girl.

After a few minutes she came slowly down the stairs again. In the hall below she perceived an officer. He had just brushed his hair to the last degree of smoothness, and, having straightened his uniform, took up a violin-case and prepared to go to the door opening into the drawing-room. At this moment he glanced up, and the two young people looked into each other's eyes.

It was as it always is under such circumstances. He made a low bow, his spurs striking lightly together, then opened the door for the young girl to enter before him.

It was only dimly lighted, but still as she walked quickly through it Elsie could not help admiring the sumptuous new arrangement of the large dark room. It had become the veritable type of an old German state apartment, with its dark wainscoting, the handsome carved oak furniture, and the costly hangings which fell to the floor in such graceful folds; here and there shone faint reflections from the artistic bronzes and the palms in the "Makart-bouquets" gently waved their branches as she passed by.

A flood of light burst from Frieda's salon, with the sound of eager talking and laughing. As the young girl appeared at the door the conversation died away for an instant, introductions followed, and then Elsie found herself in the midst of the fragrant and intoxicating atmos-

phere of the drawing-room. She fled to Aunt Lotte's side, and ensconced herself behind her arm-chair, and from this shelter the big child-like eyes gazed out upon the unfamiliar scene. Such a buzzing and talking, such laughing and joking! They chatted over the happenings in their small circle, of promotion, and a little "chronique scandaleuse," and in the midst of all an energetic word or two could be heard from Aunt Ratenow. It was one glitter of dazzling uniforms, of exquisite but simple toilets, and suddenly some one said Bernardi was going to play.

The officer with whom Elsie had entered took a violin out of its case, and conversed earnestly for a moment with Frieda; then she sat down before the piano, and, pushing back the lace ruffles at her wrists, struck a few chords. Instantly an intense silence reigned in the room.

"Bernardi is going to play, Elsie. Pay attention!" whispered Aunt Lotte. "He plays divinely!" and in an instant, as the young man's slender hand drew the bow across the strings, a wonderfully soft, sweet note trembled through the room; tone followed tone, the melody sometimes plaintive and sorrowful, as though the little brown violin were weeping, sometimes in brilliant staccato, in wild passionate rhythm, and then the bow was lowered.

Elsie started; it seemed to her as if she had just awakened from a dream. Every one applauded vigorously, and Aunt Ratenow was even more enthusiastic than the rest.

"My dear Bernardi," she cried, "indeed I understand nothing of modern music; long ago your father moved me to tears when he played Beethoven's 'Adelaide' upon this same violin. Nevertheless, I must grant the palm to the son," and she extended her hand to the young man, who grasped it, bowing deeply. Then he whispered to Frieda, and in an instant, making a second bow to the old lady, he took up his bow, and Beethoven's 'Adelaide' floated upon the air.

“Deutlich schimmert auf jedem Purpurblättchen: Adelaide, Adelaide!” whispered Aunt Lotte, with brightening eyes. “Oh! what a pity, finished already! Oh, dear Lieutenant Bernardi, how wonderful!” Elsie heard her say, and as she glanced up he was standing before her aunt, but he was looking over the white cap at her. He had dark, almost melancholy eyes, which lent a peculiar expression to his regular features with the saucy black mustache. His comrades asserted that he was descended from the gypsies, and so naturally he could tame the little “Wommernholz.”

“Is Fräulein von Hegebach also musical?” he now asked, as sociably as possible, and drawing his chair between Elsie and Aunt Lotte.

“I sing a little,” she replied, and with that they were in the midst of a conversation. Aunt Lotte put in a word occasionally, for the sake of propriety only, as she understood nothing of music; she was, however, inwardly astonished at Elsie, who talked so knowingly about thorough bass, Chopin and Wagner. What a quantity the little one had learned!

She sat beside him at the table; she had no idea how fast the hours were flying. She saw neither Moritz’s smile nor Frau von Ratenow’s stern glance.

“The children of to-day,” said the old lady to herself, “can be brought out of their corner and taken directly into society; they know how to chatter!” Then she arose and, consequently, gave the signal for the breaking up of the supper.

As Elsie kissed her hand and wished her “Gesegnete Mahlzeit!” she held fast to the young girl’s arm.

“You will perhaps go over with me, child,” and without waiting for the reappearance of Frieda, who was engaged in the adjoining room, she took, as she called it, “French leave,” which means that she slipped through Moritz’s library, and so left the company unobserved.

“Well, Elsie,” she said, in her pleasant room, “that is over with. Mercy on us, how those young women do chatter! You are not exactly tongue-tied yourself. Did you enjoy it?”

“Oh, aunt!”—the young girl had grown scarlet.

“The one blessing was that Bernardi played,” said Frau von Ratenow, without noticing the blush. “Ring for the maid, Elsie, she must bring fresh water, and then you may go; go to sleep, child, to-morrow morning we will have a talk.”

“Elsie, where are you keeping yourself?” called Frieda’s voice, outside.

“Oh! well, then, I can’t help it,” muttered the old lady, and in a moment Frieda stood in the door-way, motioning to Elsie to come.

“I really believe,” said the young woman, when they were in the hall, “that mamma wanted to send you to bed like a little child. Hurry! you must read your part to-day, afterward we are going to dance.”

It was long past midnight as Elsie went up the stairs. She looked once more over the carved balusters to the entrance-hall beneath, where the guests were wrapping themselves up in cloaks and hoods preparatory to going home. Bernardi stood in the center among them and saluted her. “Good-night!” she cried, like a merry child. Then she sat for a long time by Aunt Lotte’s bed and told her about the boarding-school, about Sister Beate, and of everything she could think of; they even mentioned the dead puss. It was all the same what they talked about, for she could never sleep to-night; there was no chance of that.

CHAPTER VI.

ON the following morning the rain came down in torrents; it rushed and drizzled over the roofs, it sputtered and murmured in the gutters, and the groaning branches

of the trees, stripped of half their leaves, were tossed hither and thither by the cold autumn wind.

This raw, frigid tone seemed to have overcome the entire household, for Aunt Lotte and Elsie were the only members of the family who arose in a cheerful frame of mind.

"Now, auntie dear, you shall be well off," she had said; and when the old lady entered her sitting-room she found all her small tasks had been done for her—the room dusted, the flowers watered, and the bullfinch in his cage taken care of; and Elsie, in her simple little gown, was seated at the window gazing out at the storm.

"I love this weather," she began, when they were drinking their coffee, "it is so cozy in the house; but nevertheless, it is stupid that it rains. I must go to papa's, Aunt Lotte. My conscience troubles me that I was so merry here last night and had not yet been to see him."

She had scarcely finished speaking when some one knocked, and Moritz entered. He wore a heavy cloth coat and high boots.

"Oh, Moritz, you have got a headache!" exclaimed Aunt Lotte. He nodded and shook hands with her.

"It is almost unbearable," he responded. "I have come to ask Elsie if she would like to go into town; I have something to attend to at the Rath-haus."

She was ready at once, and went after her hat and cloak. Moritz gazed at her attentively.

"She has grown to be a dear pretty girl, Aunt Lotte," he said, as the door closed behind her. The old lady quickly nodded her acquiescence.

"But how goes it with all of your people down-stairs, Moritz?"

"Well, only so-so. Frieda is low in her mind; she has received bad news; her father's brother is dead. She never knew him, she says; but evidently the family will go into mourning, especially as the old gentleman was unmarried

and has left his entire fortune to my father-in-law. Frieda wants to go to town with me to make some purchases."

"Ay, ay!" exclaimed Aunt Lotte, "and your theatricals?"

"It puts an end to them, thank fortune," he said, smiling in spite of his headache.

"Well, well! Elsie, we have not got so far. Frieda is not nearly ready yet," he remarked to the girl as she again appeared, "but in the meantime you might run down and say good-morning to mother."

Frau von Ratenow sat by the window sorting an enormous pile of stockings, drawing each one over her hand and scrutinizing it sharply through her glasses.

"It is sweet and good of you, Elsie," she said in the course of the conversation and more gently than she was wont to speak, "but you know old gentlemen have their peculiarities, and you must not think your father does not love you if he should say to you that he is willing to have you stay with us. It appears to you, and perhaps also to others, hard and harsh, but you must look for the explanation in his dreary life of trials, in the entire joyless seclusion in which he has only had himself to think of—perhaps in time he may become more approachable."

Whoever would have recognized in these words the severe, decided woman who to-day only endeavored to put the father's actions in the best light for the child.

"My regards to your father!" she called after her, as the young girl stood in the door-way. Frieda was evidently in the worst possible humor; she lay back in the carriage, closely wrapped up in her soft fur cloak, and did not speak. At last she took a dainty purse in her hand and shook out its contents into her cambric handkerchief.

"There is not nearly enough, Moritz," she said, playing with the gold pieces, "you must pay the bill at Derwendt's yourself, I will have the things charged to-day."

Without further ceremony he drew out his pocket-book

and silently gave her a couple of bank-notes. She took them, pushed them into her porte-monnaie with the other money and put it in her pocket.

“Moritz, may I buy that little *étagère* for the drawing-room?” she asked, and looked at him entreatingly with her blue eyes.

He turned his head wearily toward her; but his vexed expression vanished as he looked at the beautiful face that smiled at him so fascinatingly from under the black fur cap. “How devoted your heart is to such trumpery!” he said. “I am willing; but we must have an auction next, you have got so many things, mustn’t we? However, as for this, what does it cost?”

“Oh! it is not so bad; a hundred marks, perhaps, Moritz.”

He did not speak; and Elsie did not know what to say; then the carriage stopped before the major’s house and Elsie sprung out. She went once more through the crooked entrance and up the steep stairs, hesitated a moment at the door of her father’s room, then went into the little kitchen first.

Old Siethmann had just placed a couple of wine-glasses upon a tray, and her trembling hands were endeavoring to draw the cork from a bottle of Rhine wine.

“Give it to me, Dora,” smilingly said the girl, “I have more strength.”

“Mercy on us!” screamed the old woman, joyfully. “Elschen! Fräulein Elschen! and how you have grown! And I say, of course it must happen so! For ten years we haven’t had a guest, and to-day they come out of every corner!”

Elsie set the bottle of wine on the tray.

“Who is here then, Dora, who is talking with papa? I would not like to disturb him.”

“Now you must guess!” ejaculated the old woman, simpering, and tying on a clean apron. “Now you are

full of curiosity, Elschen. I see that, just as your mother used to be. Well"—and she came close up to the girl—"it is the Bennewitzer! I didn't know him," she continued. "A fine gentleman in black came and asked for the major, his cousin; if I had told your papa first, he certainly never would have seen him; but I, without waiting, opened the door right away, and—clap!—there they sat together. Now only let them quarrel a bit, Elschen, I don't believe it would be to your disadvantage; for, truly you know that they have behaved toward each other like a cat and a dog on account of the inheritance. And now—but—do you want to carry in the wine, Elschen?"

"Did papa wish for it?" asked the young girl.

"Goodness! he never thinks of such things," returned the old woman, shrugging her shoulders. "I only supposed when members of the family came that way for a visit a body knew what was suitable."

At this moment the major's voice resounded, even as far as the kitchen, in such powerful and wrathful tones that Siethmann, who was pressing the tray upon the girl, sunk down overcome with fright.

"Oh, mercy, Elsie, he is angry," she stammered; and indeed the violent exclamations of the excited man fell upon the trembling girl's ear. In an instant she had hurried across the hall, had opened the door and was standing upon the threshold, deadly pale, but with an expression of perfect ingenuousness.

"Papa, I do not intrude?" she asked, going toward the old man, who stood motionless in the middle of the room with a letter in his hand, his face crimson, and staring at her as if she were an apparition.

The fine-looking man leaning against the window did not bear the least resemblance to his excited, wrathful cousin; in his outward appearance he was a gentleman from head to foot, and he also seemed to have retained a

well-bred calm; at least his face, with the sad lines at the corner of the mouth, was utterly unmoved.

"You do not disturb us in the least, Fräulein von Hegebach," he said with a low bow, "it is even a welcome interruption. I was just trying to explain a misunderstanding to your father, and it was aggravated by new differences."

"Papa!" the lovely young creature had put both arms around the worn old man, "dear papa, I am so glad to be with you again!" And she clung to him as if she would shield him from all the troubles in the world.

Major von Hegebach was for a moment disconcerted; he stroked his daughter's fair hair with one hand, while with the other he pushed her from him.

"Afterward, afterward, my child. I must talk with— with this gentleman here."

"The young lady need not disturb us, cousin. I think we might sit down and settle the whole matter quietly, as is fitting for men in the presence of a lady," said the Bennewitzer, and pushed his chair toward the table, which was completely covered with cigar boxes and newspapers. "I beg of you, Wilhelm," he continued, placing a chair for Elsie also, "let us talk the matter over calmly. You know I have not come here in any implacable mood, and you also know well which of us two has had the harder fate."

Hegebach had taken a seat in obedience to a beseeching look from Elsie. For a moment it was perfectly still in the smoky old room.

"We two," the Bennewitzer began again, "can not help it that our uncle, Heaven forgive him, made his will as he did and not otherwise; it is too late to change it now. Your claims, as you must have known yourself before you raised them, and as your counsel ought to have told you, are untenable. I have not the right to divide the estate and fortune which I have inherited, but I am able to make

you the proposal which I mentioned a little while ago, and it proceeded from good and honorable sentiments. Accept this offer, Wilhelm, even if not on your own account, for the sake of your daughter."

"I will not accept it," said the major, "and then wait—for the rest."

"For Heaven's sake be reasonable, Wilhelm!" begged the Bennewitzer, casting a glance at the young girl.

"I know what I have to do. I thank you!"

The old man took up a bundle of newspapers with his trembling hands and laid them in another place, then nervously flapped the cover of a cigar-box back and forth. Elsie looked helplessly from one to the other.

"The question is a very important one, Fräulein von Hegebach," said the Bennewitzer, turning to the young girl. "Your father has the idea lately, since a cruel fate has robbed me of my two sons and consequently of the heirs of the family estate, that he has claims upon it. I do not know if he has gone so far as to carry them into the courts; at all events he is badly advised. I came to-day in order to prevent this entirely hopeless lawsuit, and wanted—"

"To lay a plaster over my mouth!" interrupted the major, hastily. "Again I decline your help in a case where I claim and demand my rights!"

The Bennewitzer arose. "My intentions were good, Wilhelm; far be it from me to wish to force anything upon you: prosecute your claim then."

He took his hat, with its deep mourning, from the chair next him and held out his hand to Elsie. "It would give me great pleasure to be permitted to meet my charming cousin under more agreeable circumstances. Adieu, Fräulein von Hegebach." The next moment the door closed behind the distinguished-looking man.

"Papa!" said the girl sadly, after the old man, apparently forgetting her presence, had rummaged for awhile

among the letters and papers in his writing-desk. "Papa!" Hegebach started suddenly and rubbed his forehead. "Papa, I would like to talk with you a little."

He discontinued his search and looked at her.

"I only wanted to say to you that I would have come to you so gladly and have kept house for you, would have read aloud to you in the evenings, and have arranged your rooms neatly."

There must have been something in her voice which compelled him to listen to her still further. He sat down in his arm-chair and leaned his head upon his hand.

"And I would so willingly have taken care of you when you were ill, and you would not have been so lonely any more, for—Aunt Ratenow—" the girl's clear voice broke suddenly from pain and anxiety. "Let me stay with you, papa. I am so sorry for you!" she cried, winding her arms around the old man's neck. "You are always so alone, you can never be happy!"

"No, Elsie; that would not do," he answered; but he did not shake off the little hands. "You have no luck in life, poor child! that you should call such a beggar as I am 'father!' It might have been different. But he whom Fate has once set upon a jaded beast, never again during his whole existence mounts a decent horse. I've told your Aunt Ratenow how much I have to live upon—twenty thalers a month! It sounds ridiculous, doesn't it? The rest of my pension goes for debts of long standing, which I must honorably discharge, and which will require years yet before they can be paid."

"Papa!"

She wanted to reply, but he cut her words short.

"It is best so, as Frau von Ratenow said to me the day before yesterday. You are to undertake the education of the little Ratenows, and to receive a proper compensation for it; and, moreover, you are like a child of the house there. That is better luck than a hundred others would

have in your position. As for the rest, we will wait," he concluded.

The young girl had sprung up and was looking at the speaker with a deathly pale face, but she did not utter a word. She only realized one thing instantaneously—that a sweet, golden, careless girlhood no longer lay before her. The dear old house out yonder appeared before her as if veiled in deep shadow. She no longer had a right there; she must earn it first by her services. She was, on a sudden, thrown from her position as a child of the house back into one of servitude! Oh! how could she have thought that love and kindness would be given for nothing? They had educated a governess for themselves—that was all.

At this moment the young girl's heart was filled with an indescribable bitterness; it was not fear of the work, but the pain of a great disillusion.

"Good-bye, papa," she said, putting on her hat; "I will come to see you as often as—" She hesitated; in her present mood she wanted to say, "as often as my master and mistress—" but then Moritz's good face came into her mind; "as often as I am permitted," she corrected herself.

He shook hands with her.

"Things may improve, Elsie; you are still so young."

She nodded.

"Good-bye, papa."

Then she went away. How differently she had come! She stood at the door with a sad face; the handsome carriage which had brought her was just turning the corner; Moritz was coming after her, for she had promised to wait for him.

"What is the matter, Elsie?" he asked, as he sprung out to help her into the carriage. "Has anything vexed you, little one?"

And he took her hand.

"When do you wish me to begin the lessons?" was the

answer, as they were driven away. "And don't you wish to examine my certificate?"

He looked up; the tone of her voice was so strange; her lips were painfully compressed.

"The lessons?" he asked. "Oh, yes! I believe mother did intend to ask you to try to teach the children a little bit. Would you like it, Elsie?"

"It is all arranged," she replied. "I was not consulted beforehand."

"Have you been offended in any way, Elsie? Nobody intended to do so, believe me," he said, gently, looking at the girl's white face.

Her eyes were filled with tears as she glanced at him.

"Moritz, I will do anything; I will stay with your children day and night; but don't offer me any money for it. I can not bear it," she sobbed.

"But, Elsie, Elsie, how wrongly you look at it!" he exclaimed, shocked.

And, as the carriage at that moment stopped before the door, he said:

"I beg you to go to Aunt Lotte, Elsie. I must first speak to mother; I'll be up there in an instant to talk with you—"

Elsie had been standing in her room looking out at the rain and the storm. She was no longer weeping; all at once she had become calm. Yesterday lay far behind her; it seemed as though she had been dreaming.

Why, indeed, had she forgotten what Aunt Ratenow had so often said to her when she was a child?

"You must learn to stand upon your own feet in the future."

But who ever thinks about the necessities of life when in the midst of merry young playfellows, and when existence is still like a May morning?

"Elsie!" called a voice just then.

She turned about, and Aunt Ratenow stood before her.

"I am sorry, Elsie, that you so greatly misjudge a thing which is most kindly meant. I can not help the facts, and must repeat to you that your circumstances are not such as will allow you to flutter through life like a gay butterfly; you must even become the industrious bee. If you wish to teach the children, it is of course understood that you shall receive compensation for it as any one else would. I am not able, and I have no right to do otherwise; it is only false pride which prompts you to refuse to accept it, and if you reflect upon the case you will comprehend it. Life is long, my child; meanwhile, I will by no means lay the hateful money in your hands, but will let it accumulate, and will take care of it for you, so that you may have a little fund. However, no one forces you to undertake the teaching—understand that, Elsie. You are a guest in my house, and may remain one so long as it is agreeable to you. The decision lies with you, Elsie."

"I accept it, and will give the instruction," said the girl, softly.

"That is right, Elsie. Everything else remains as of old. How is your father?"

"He was excited; he had a dispute with the Bennewitzer. I met him at papa's."

"The Bennewitzer?" exclaimed Frau von Ratenow, so vehemently that the girl was startled. "And you tell that so casually? Did he see you?"

"Yes, aunt."

"What did he want?"

Elsie was silent for a moment; she had felt that her father was about to give way to a false idea.

"It was on account of Bennewitz—the estate," she said. "I think my father wishes to get a division of it by law."

"Has he gone mad?" cried the old lady, flushing with anger; and then, recollecting that the man's daughter stood before her, she added, "you do not understand it, Elsie; and I do not mean quite that; I must talk with your

father; he will mix up a fine broth for himself. How did the Bennewitzer appear, Elsie?" and she stroked the girl's face with her hand. "We will arrange it pleasantly here now for the winter," she went on, without waiting for a reply.

"Aunt Lotte," said the girl, with a sorrowful smile, as she went into the cheerful sitting-room a little later, "if I should forget again some day, then remind me of it."

"Of what, then, Rosebud?"

"Of this—that I am a poor girl."

CHAPTER VII.

HOWEVER, it was not possible that she should always be able to remember it.

The following morning, Elsie had wandered through the garden, and every tree had nodded to her: Do you know me still? Each spot where she had played as a child had whispered sweet words into the young heart which was almost painfully touched. The sun shone so brightly and clearly over the imposing old house, and she knew every roof, every wind-mill, every hill—far off into the country. No; notwithstanding all, she was at home; notwithstanding all, she was not poor!

How could she hold fast to troubled thoughts in the midst of so much cheerfulness, pleasure, and gayety?

It was too lovely in the pleasant dining-room, at the well-arranged table, so delightful when Aunt Ratenow related something of the past! It was like a merry sunbeam when Mme. Frieda laughed, and the children joined in with her, and Moritz presided at the head of the table with such dignity, carving the roast and looking after everybody!

"Elsie, really, will you not have anything more? Now eat something, little girl; see this delicious bit from Master Hare. Do—that is right—do you like it?"

And, after dinner, he took his small boy on his back, and then there was a wild chase in the garden, up and down the paths all together; such a shouting and tittering and laughing, until Frieda exclaimed:

“Stop, Moritz! We can’t catch you!”

Then the drives through the country in the autumn days. Sometimes, too, the handsome coupé of the young wife rolled through the streets of the little town where the clerks of the shops in which they wished to make purchases respectfully opened the door and helped the ladies out of the carriage.

In the evenings, there were always visits, and then Johann knocked at Aunt Lotte’s door, and begged that Fräulein von Hegebach would come down to the young madame’s salon.

Then how quickly the little hands would busy themselves before the mirror, arranging the shining hair and fastening on the knot of bright ribbon; especially when the old man had added, “There is going to be music.”

Whoever would have thought that the detested piano and singing-lessons should have such a train of beautiful sisters? And who would have believed that anything in the world could so sing and wail as the little brown violin which Lieutenant Bernardi held in his arms?

The commencement of Elsie’s duties was still put off. She did not know that Moritz had privately said to his wife:

“Frieda, dear, do you understand? You intend positively that the children shall not go to work before January?”

So when Elsie had begged the young mother that she would decide when the lessons were to begin, Frieda had very quietly answered that they had long enough time to consider that; she could not think of shutting the children up before the second of January; before that Moritz must arrange a school-room with proper chairs. The eldest daughter was growing altogether too fast, and, besides

that, the children would not have any interest before Christmas.

Nothing that Aunt Ratenow said did any good now, for Frieda's opinion, as the mother's, must be respected; and, more than that, in this season of quiet mourning it was not altogether too agreeable to the young woman to have a companion with her, for her to listen to any "reasonable remonstrance." And Moritz? Well, he was "under petticoat government," as his mother, within her own four walls, and in an under-tone, said to Aunt Lotte.

In Frieda's drawing-room, Elsie had found her former schoolmate again, Fräulein Annie Cramm. She had returned home directly after her confirmation, and had been in society for two years. Her thin face, with the light blue eyes, looked just as pale and immature as formerly, and her hair was as flaxen as ever; but it was arranged with the utmost care, and her gown of costly material always fitted faultlessly the young lady's somewhat angular figure.

"She is a goose!" said Frieda, frankly.

"But one with golden feathers, dear child," added Aunt Ratenow; "that makes amends for a great deal."

Elsie chatted with Annie Cramm about the school to her heart's content.

The young lady even came up after awhile to see Aunt Lotte. Then, one minute she would sigh and look mournful, and the next give a minute account of each ball and of the partners with whom she had danced quadrilles or the cotillon. As she possessed a small soprano voice, she was often drawn to Frieda's *musicales*. She preferred to sing solos, and always appeared in a fine toilet, even if it were not invariably exactly suited to the occasion or to her figure, and thus she often excited the derision of the young hostess, who possessed a sensitiveness which was almost morbid with regard to everything which was not *chic*.

Elsie's black cashmere gown appeared in her eyes, once for all, as "tolerably becoming." What should Frieda do?

In the beginning she had had the intention of improving the girl's more than simple wardrobe from her own, but she had thereupon met with most decided opposition from her otherwise so yielding husband.

"If Elsie needs anything," he declared, "then mother will look after the things for her, as she has always done until now; anyway, what would she do with your cast-off gowns? She is a head taller than you. I do not wish her to wear your old dresses, Frieda! Why should she be stamped with the seal of poverty in the sight of every one?"

So the slender, golden-haired maiden always appeared in her simple little black dress, a costume which only made her own charms doubly prominent.

They had now gone so far that twice a week, on appointed days, the candles burned on the piano, and sometimes there would be music from four o'clock in the afternoon until twelve at night.

"I can not do anything but blow on a comb, and by chance whistle 'Heil dir im Siegerkranz,' " exclaimed Moritz, one afternoon, as he saw Elsie in the hall coming down the stairs with a roll of music in her hand. "I shall appear punctually for supper, and afterward, if some songs were to be given, I would listen to them with delight. As for your symphonies, I don't understand them. Good-bye, Elsie; save a couple of songs for me."

Then, as he really had nothing to do out of doors, he went to his mother's room, lighted a cigar, and made himself comfortable in his father's arm-chair.

The mother and son were never at a loss for conversation; the large estate alone furnished plenty of topics, and they were accustomed to confer together over everything. The practical old lady always had good counsel at hand, and so they were soon involved in a deep agricultural argument. Then some small gossip about the little town was added, and in conclusion Moritz related that he had spoken to the Bennewitzer a few days before, in Magde-

burg, and he had told him that his cousin had gone to law against him.

“Mercy on us!” said Frau von Ratenow, “the head-strong fellow will have to bruise himself cruelly before he will be convinced that there are any walls. I have talked to him till my tongue was tired, and written till my hand was lame, but he clings fast to his supposed ‘just claims’ with an intrepidity which is worthy of a better cause.”

She stopped, but her knitting-needles clicked together more energetically than before. Nothing could make the old lady more angry than when any one would not listen to her advice.

“Tell me, my boy,” she asked, abruptly, “is it only devotion to music which brings the dark-eyed lieutenant here so often with his violin?”

“Very likely,” replied Moritz; “they certainly never do anything else, and on account of that forget to eat and drink.”

“Well, do you know, Moritz, I don’t rely upon you at all; in such matters you are like a child. I shall have to look after this for myself some day.”

“Oh, mother, Aunt Lotte is with them; she knits, and is charmed—”

“Yes, she is the right one,” nodded Frau von Ratenow, still between jest and earnest; “a good soul, but in spite of her age she would be the very first one to fall in love with Bernardi.”

Moritz burst out laughing.

“There is certainly nothing to laugh at, my boy; you once fell desperately in love yourself, and other people have eyes in their heads also and fresh young blood in their veins!” With these words she had taken off her pretty net cap, and passing her hand over the hair which was still brown, she added: “Give me the cap with the lilac ribbons out of my drawer there, Moritz. So! that is it, thank you; now we will revel a little in music, too.”

The tall man had just closed the drawer again, and was dusting some cigar ashes from his dark blue clothes.

“Yes, mother dear, if you perhaps mean Elsie—”

“I mean nothing at all, Moritz. “Are you coming with me?””

“With pleasure; you will soon see that there are no love potions in there; you are too anxious little mother.”

The candles and lamps were already lighted in the drawing-room; a concert of Kreutzer's had just been finished; and now, as the mother and son made their appearance, they were all in an animated conversation about the music. Frieda sat at the piano trying a few hard passages over again; Lieutenant Bernardi had put his violin down and was standing by Elsie, who was turning over the leaves of a piece of music. Annie Cramm and Aunt Lotte sat near the window; every one's cheeks were flushed with enthusiasm.

“We would like to hear a couple of songs,” said Moritz, to explain their unexpected appearance, while Aunt Ratenow with a loud “Good-evening, ladies, good-evening, my dear Bernardi!” took a seat in the corner by Aunt Lotte. Moritz had to smile to himself; his practical old mother was no diplomatist, she always went directly at a thing. It gave him no end of amusement to watch her.

Fräulien Annie Cramm consented to sing. Elsie sat quietly in the deep bow-window, her sweet child-like face looking out from under the heavy blue curtains, which formed a lovely background for her little golden head. Bernardi had betaken himself to the other end of the room and was leaning against Frieda's book-case, in shadow, exactly opposite Elsie.

“The family is as handsome as a picture,” Frau von Ratenow acknowledged to herself, “so straight and slender, and so graceful too; no wonder if—”

Then Annie Cramm's voice was heard, that voice which

appeared in such painful contrast with the small, high-shouldered figure of the singer.

“Very fine, my dear,” exclaimed the old lady, in praise, “but I do not understand it; it is too unearthly.”

“Mamma, what treason; that is Wagner!” exclaimed Frieda.

“I don’t know him,” was the response, given with unshaken calmness.

“Now you see! Because you will never go to the opera with us when we are in Berlin,” complained the young woman.

“Child, I have some faith in my nerves, but there I always say to myself: No! the people of to-day are beyond us! After the first act I tremble in every limb, and have only one thought; will they not soon leave off? You who are always talking of nerves could endure it for hours!”

“Elsie, will you sing us a simple song?” The young girl went to the piano with scarlet cheeks.

“We can try the old song with the new arrangement,” proposed Frieda. She had a little secret shiver over the opinions of her mother-in-law, and a discord sounded in the first bars. But now a soft, full contralto voice began:

“Wer ist so verlassen wie ich auf der Welt?
Nicht Vater noch Mutter, kein Glück und kein Geld,
Nichts weiter mehr hab’ ich bergab und bergan,
Als zwei braune Augen, dass weinen ich kann.

“Es braust durch die Lande der herbstliche Wind,
Untreu ward der Liebste mir armen Kind,
Weil silbern kein Kettlein am Halse mir gleisst!
Ach, weiss es wohl Einer, was Sehnsucht heisst?

“Dort unten rauscht’s Wasser, so tief und so hohl,
Könnt ich nur sterben, so wäre mir wohl!
Drei Blümlein, drei Röslein, ein schneeweisses Kleid,
Da schlief ich wohl süsse, ohn’ Wehe und Leid.”

“Bravo, Elsie!” said the old lady, giving her hand to the girl. The others remained silent, for Bernardi had taken up his violin and now he began to play the simple pathetic air, then a wild variation, an enchanted chaos of sound, the melody of the song running through the whole, with at last the painful cry of the last verse.

The eyes of the two young people were fixed upon each other during the performance: then the girl’s dark brimming ones sought the floor and the rose in her cheeks gave place to a slight pallor; she sat down silently by Aunt Lotte. Bernardi laid the violin away and took the applause quietly. Aunt Ratenow alone was dumb.

“It is an old song,” she said at last, “with however a new melody; didn’t you say so, Frieda?”

“Elschen!” she then exclaimed as they were finding their places in the dining-room and the young girl was on the point of taking hers next the officer, “Elschen, let Moritz or Aunt Lotte sit there and you help me here a little, I have rheumatism in my arm again.”

Elsie was ready at once. Moritz, however, looked at his mother with surprise; he had a horror of these feminine stratagems—and it was all so unnecessary too, he thought. There he sat, the dangerous one, apparently interested in talking with his pale neighbor; then he cut and peeled an orange for Frieda and related anecdotes about the army. A lively conversation went on around the table, full of both fun and earnestness, till finally Moritz spoke of the campaign and over that the men grew very warm.

It had grown late when they arose and Fräulein Annie Cramm’s carriage had been obliged to wait a long time outside in the wind and rain; now she wrapped herself in her silk and fur cloak and said good-bye in the drawing-room.

“Lieutenant Bernardi, may I offer you a seat in my carriage?” she asked.

He stood before Elsie and was talking with her, his cap

under his arm. The large room was only dimly lighted, but still Annie saw him draw a slender, half resisting, girlish hand to his lips. "Will you drive with me, Lieutenant Bernardi?" she asked again, impatiently, "it is already late, and I am in a hurry."

"Thank you, fräulein, I think I will walk; it does me so much good," he replied, with his most gallant bow.

Annie Cramm drew her veil over her pale face, and forgot to say good-night to Elsie von Hegebach. Moritz took her to her carriage and then shook hands with the young officer who was just coming down the steps; he stood there a little while, looking after the departing guests, then glanced across the court and up at the heavens and finally remained with his eyes fixed upon two windows in the upper story, behind which a light was burning. Suddenly he began to whistle a few bars from Boccacio and went into the house.

"Frieda," he said to his pretty little wife, who was just closing the piano in the salon, "isn't there something in the wind?"

"Are you just making a discovery, Moritz?" she responded, laughing.

"Yes! With Bernardi and—"

"Nonsense! She is too ugly," she interrupted.

"No, no; I mean Elsie."

"Oh! good gracious!" she returned, unmoved, "if you don't know any more than that; that is an utter impossibility—he does not think of it."

"But if she, Elsie—?"

"Heavens! I had two love affairs before I saw you, Moritz, and I still live."

He did not even hear the last; all at once the words which the girl had sung, a little while before, had occurred to him.

"Es braust durch die Lande der herbstliche Wind,
Untren ward der Liebste mir armen Kind."

“It would be infamous!” he said, and put his hand over his eyes.

Up-stairs, however, a girl was sitting on the deep window-bench, holding her clasped hands over her throbbing heart. She was not poor, she was so rich that she would not have changed places with any one in the world. Oh! was it true that life could be so beautiful. Was it then possible that any one could love her so dearly as his eyes so plainly told her. She sat there for a long time watching the lights of the town, until one after the other was extinguished; from the next room came the sound of Aunt Lotte’s regular breathing; she was sleeping so sweetly and soundly, and forgot to get up and say to her as she herself had indeed forgotten: “Child, what are you dreaming of? you are only a poor girl.”

CHAPTER VIII.

OUT of doors the winter had come; at Christmas the snow lay white and glistening on the roofs of the houses and over the peaceful country, and it fell almost constantly until the new year. The high-roads were as solid and smooth as the finest floor, and Moritz had the horses’ shoes sharpened for they were to have a sleigh-ride, a large sleighing party.

The young Frau von Ratenow, in a dark-blue velvet costume, trimmed with fur, was just drawing on her gloves before the long mirror in her bedroom. She looked sweet enough to kiss, Moritz asserted, and moreover he would be delighted with the whole thing if only this unlucky Bernardi would not want to drive Elsie.

The young wife almost imperceptibly shrugged her pretty shoulders. “This everlasting anxiety about Elsie! Mamma talks of nothing else, and you are as bad; is she then so much better than all the other girls?”

“Yes!” replied Moritz, warmly; “she has a true, tender heart, and when she feels a thing she does it fully and entirely. The little girl is perfectly free from superficial trifling or even coquetry.”

“You appear to have made a very thorough study of this girlish soul,” was the quiet, apparently unmoved answer; but Moritz was too well acquainted with the tones of the flexible voice not to know that the speaker was vexed.

“Frieda! I beg of you! I have known her ever since the first day of her life, as I know our children!” His honest eyes gazed with a truly shocked expression into the face that looked so blooming under the ostrich feathers on her hat—but she quietly fastened the last button of the long glove and took up her dainty muff.

“I think the gentlemen are already in the drawing-room;” then she swept past him without taking the slightest notice of the conciliatory hand which was extended to her.

It was not the first time that Frieda had spoken such words; according to her opinion it was intolerable, the way they all worried about the girl who was certainly very well off. Who would stir a hand for her if she were at home with her irritable old father? Mamma Ratenow was always emphasizing the fact that she wished to prevent unhappiness and Moritz repeated it, like a faithful echo. In fact, it was tiresome. What did it amount to if an officer did pay her some attention? She was only amusing herself; they might allow that—there was certainly no danger, for—he was altogether too sensible. Bernardi—and Elsie! Absurd!

Frieda’s cheeks were still flushed with displeasure as she went into the drawing-room to welcome Captain von Franken and Lieutenant Bernardi, the two gentlemen who had begged for the honor of driving the ladies.

The captain, a tall, handsome man and a great admirer of the young Frau von Ratenow, sunk laughingly upon one

knee and presented her with a bunch of pale yellow, southern roses.

Elsie, with a happy face, held a bouquet of violets in her hand.

“Oh, Frieda, look! snow and ice out of doors and these lovely flowers! It is like a dream!”

Like a dream, indeed! Life was like a sweet dream!

The sunlight sparkled and glittered over the snow-covered country, the air was clear and cold, and so deliciously pure, and the little bells jingled as the train of sleighs flew so delightfully over the road: how beautiful the world appears when happiness dwells in the heart! The brightness of the young girl's expression had only been clouded over once; that was as they drove down the Rosengasse and she looked up at the house where her father lived. He had stood at the window in dressing-gown and cap, but he had not returned the eager salutation and nod of the golden head. Papa was always so absorbed in thought. Papa was sometimes hardly aware that he possessed a daughter. But then the music began and they went on talking with each other; of nothing at all and still of so much.

“My first name is Bernhard,” he had said, as he carefully wrapped the warm robe around the young girl.

“Bernhard Bernardi!” That sounds lovely, thought Elsie.

“Your cousin, Frau von Ratenow, has attended to everything for our enjoyment,” he went on. “Imagine! Where should we have danced to-night, if not in the hall at the Burg? Charming people, really!”

“Where is Annie Cramm? With whom is she driving?” asked Elsie.

He laughed and his white teeth glistened under the black mustache.

“Ensign Herbard was ordered to that duty.”

“Oh, how detestable! Annie is so good!”

“Good! Is that all? That is very little.”

"That is a great deal, mein Herr," said the young girl, with intense earnestness in the child-like brown eyes.

He could not help looking at her continually, he knew every feature of her pure fresh face but it was such a delight to drive thus with the lovely creature who was so different—so—so—he did not know the right word himself—so simple-hearted—so kissable—so truly womanly in her whole nature. And while his eyes were fixed upon her he thought of his home and of his mother, and then he stood suddenly in his mother's old-fashioned parlor and by him—stood Elsie.

"There go Hunger and Thirst driving together," exclaimed the stout Judge Golling to Lieutenant von Rost, lightly blowing the smoke from his cigar into the cold winter air, as they followed in the next sleigh. These two had no ladies with them; perhaps they did not want any. Lieutenant von Rost represented the feminine element, and had tied a handkerchief around his arm, and managed an enormous dark red fan with great skill.

"Well, that is endurable on a sleigh-ride; the good buffets at the Burg form a comfortable background," yawned the lieutenant.

"Good gracious, the man will never be so mad as to have serious intentions?" questioned the judge.

"Eh? how do I know?" yawned the officer, anew; "it's his affair; he knows as well as the rest of us that the old man has nothing."

"He is going pretty fast, dear Rost, and—by the way—he is a man of deep feelings."

"Yes, but who isn't? However, there is an end to comfort," exclaimed the lieutenant, and, with a grimace, dropping the eyeglass through which he had anxiously watched the couple who were driving before him.

Moritz came last with a pretty young married woman; he was troubled and constantly tried to get a glimpse of Frieda and Elsie.

“Fräulein von Hegebach is some distance ahead, Herr von Ratenow. Bernardi is driving her. He is at your house a great deal, is he not? I am related to a sister of his; the father was formerly the county physician here. He must have a large practice in B.; but beyond that, I believe, nothing. So many children, you know, Herr von Ratenow.”

“I know the circumstances of his family perfectly well,” responded Moritz, out of humor, and understanding very well what she wished to intimate to him.

“Oh, indeed! Pardon me, my dear Herr von Hegebach,” the young lady begged, looking at him with astonishment.

Well, then, they knew at the Burg that he was by no means a good parti. In the meantime, a regular uproar was raging at the Burg, as Aunt Ratenow said angrily to Aunt Lotte. The tables were being arranged in the dining-room, and the gardener had dragged half the contents of the hot-house into the hall where they were to dance.

Promptly on the first of January, Frieda had laid aside her mourning; to-day was the first large entertainment, and it was certainly an impromptu one. Last evening she had come home from a reception with this idea in her head, and the first thing in the morning had put all the hands and feet in the house in motion.

“Only leave me in peace,” said Frau von Ratenow to her daughter-in-law. “Send the children to me, so that they may not be in your way; that is all I will have to do with it.”

In Frieda’s bedroom the dainty pale blue silk gown lay ready for the evening, together with every trifle which she would need for her toilet.

Upstairs in Elsie’s room, two aged hands had put out the simple white muslin dress which the young girl had received for Christmas, and on the table in front of the old lady stood two little bronze shoes, small enough for a

child. In perfect bliss, she had fastened rose-colored bows here and there; it was assuredly no light matter to prepare her adopted child for her first dance. She had then hurriedly arrayed herself in her gray silk, had lighted the lamp and taken up one of Hachländer's novels. Now she was waiting for Elsie, in order to help her, for she would be obliged to make a quick toilet.

By degrees it grew quieter down-stairs; the preparations were finished, and the calm before the storm had commenced.

But now the sleigh-bells jingled outside. There they were, Moritz, Frieda and Elsie, with the whole company; it was only a few moments before the girl's light step came down the hall, the door was opened, and she stood on the threshold, rosy, and apparently out of breath.

"Good-evening, my dear little auntie!" she exclaimed, throwing both of her arms around the old lady's neck, and bringing a current of fresh, cool, frosty air into the room with her.

"Was it nice, Mouse? Did you enjoy yourself? Come, drink a cup of tea." But the young girl hastily declined it, and flew into her own room; she stood there a long time in the darkness, and forgot to take off her hat and cloak.

Aunt Lotte finally came in to help her.

"But, Elsie, you are standing there still, when it is high time for you to dress!"

She brought a light and took off the child's wraps.

"What is the matter, dear, are you crying?"

She did not answer, but began to dress herself; somehow the hair would not go up right, the trembling hands unfastened the heavy braids three times, and the rose would not stay in its place.

"It is right there!" said Aunt Lotte. "You are not generally so vain."

Yes, generally, good Aunt Lotte. She had no suspicion

for whom the child was adorning herself. At last she was ready. "Aunt Lotte, I am so frightened to-day." She trembled as if with nervousness.

"Why! what is the matter, child? You must have taken cold when you were in the sleigh."

"No, no, do come, auntie!"

"Won't you take a few drops of *eau-de-cologne*, Elsie?"

She did not reply. She again stood motionless with her eyes looking singularly bright, as she gazed ahead of her—at nothing. She seemed to hear her name again, "Elsie," and then a few simple words. "Happiness! if this moment is not happiness, what is?"

His voice had faltered so strangely. On the drive home he had talked to her about his parents; how good and sweet his mother was, how she loved to hear him play on his violin. His father had played it once too; he recollected very well, as a little boy, sitting in his mother's lap, listening attentively, while his father walked up and down in the room playing. Sometimes, then, he had let the bow fall, and had come over to kiss the mother and child. Ah! yes, the little violin had seen much happiness, that was the reason why it could sing so sweetly. Ah! happiness! If this moment is not happiness, what is?

And then suddenly he had taken her little hand in his, and Elsie's eyes had filled with tears; but beneath the tears the young heart laughed and rejoiced, and above them the heavens were spread out filled with glittering stars.

"Elsie, come, I beg of you!" implored Aunt Lotte. "I believe we are the very last ones."

She followed the gray silk train as if she were in a dream; she dreaded seeing him again in the bright light down-stairs, and yet her heart beat hard and fast.

The brilliantly lighted hall and the adjoining drawing-room were already filled with guests; card tables had been set out in Moritz's library, and Frau von Ratenow already held a pack of cards in her hand. She was talking with

an old gentleman, as Elsie came up to kiss her hand. The old lady stared at her an instant, in amazement—the girl was so beautiful this evening; she stroked her cheek almost timidly, and followed her with her eyes as she walked through the gay colored crowd; the dainty figure in the close-fitting white gown, through which the neck and arms gleamed so prettily, and the small head, bent just a trifle, and yet so proud. She had stopped by Annie Cramm. That young lady looked particularly ill-humored and sharp under her crown of white daisies; in her lilac gown, with its too elaborate trimming of lace and flowers, she had the appearance of a wax figure, which had been put in a show window by a modiste in order to draw attention to a new costume; everything about her was so exquisite, from her satin shoes to the costly point-lace fan and the diamond butterfly which fluttered and sparkled so pretentiously upon the young lady's thin neck.

“What kind of a rig is this present fashion!” muttered Frau von Ratenow. “I wonder how Annie Cramm is able to dance in such closely tied skirts. Heaven help us, how she looks!”

The first notes of the waltz had floated through the room, and the guests had divided into couples, as if by magic; it was a beautiful picture in a rich frame.

“Where is Elsie, Lottchen? I don't see her any longer,” said the old lady. “There! there!” exclaimed the other, who had just entered. “Ratenowchen, the child does not dance, she flies!” she cried in ecstasy, and took up her eyeglass in order to follow her darling with her delighted eyes. “Because there is still pleasure in it, madame,” remarked the old lady, with gold spectacles. “Ah! yes, eighteen years old!”

“Tell me, my dear judge, are you not the counselor of the Bennewitzer-Hegebach?” asked Frau von Ratenow.

“I have that honor, madame.”

“Well?”

“Well, the major’s complaint is refused, naturally.”

“As a matter of course,” nodded Frau von Ratenow, “does he know it yet?”

“It was to have been announced to him to-day, madame; for the rest, I am curious as to its effect.”

Frau von Ratenow suddenly looked at the speaker with a face full of trouble. “Do you believe that he will be quieted by it?”

“Never!” was the reply; “so long as the old mad man has breath, just so long will he quarrel.”

The dance was ended, and now the young people came back into the adjoining room or else were drawn into the delightful nooks under the laurel and orange-trees. Bernardi had taken Elsie into Frieda’s little boudoir; the girl was looking for the mistress of the room in order to help lighten her duties as hostess. Nobody was to be seen, until they discovered the two little fair-haired girls who, in very short frocks, were entertaining themselves upon the lounge with one of mamma’s handsome books. Frieda’s big mastiff was lying contentedly by them.

Elsie sat down by the children in one of the low arm-chairs, and began to chat with them; the eldest laid the book on her knees. They made a lovely picture and she felt that Bernardi was looking at her with admiration; she glanced up and their eyes met, until she, blushing deeply again, dropped her lids.

“Now we shall soon begin to study,” said the young girl, stroking the hair back from the forehead of the eldest.

“I can read already, Aunt Elsie; listen!” and pointing to the letters with her tiny finger, the child read what was written under one of the pictures:

“Die Minne überwindet alle Ding—
Du lügst! sprach der Pfenning.”

Elsie looked at the picture; it was an illustration from the “Altdeutschen Witz und Verstand.” A marriage

procession was mounting the steps of a church, the young patrician leading his magnificently dressed bride, and the kindred of both crowding after. At one side stood a young girl in miserable apparel who wore no ornament save two long golden braids; she had turned her back upon the bridal train and was weeping, with her apron over her face.

Bernardi looked at the page over Elsie's shoulder.

The little girl asked if he liked the picture, but he did not answer.

"Oh! Bernardi, just a word," broke suddenly upon his ear in the voice of Lieutenant von Rost. He stepped over the soft carpet toward his comrade. "What do you want, Rost?" he asked, when they had reached the next room.

"Bernardi," said the officer, taking his glass from his eye, "you and I have always been able to endure an honest word from one another; get leave of absence for a while, or else exchange into some other regiment, or even marry Fräulein Annie Cramm—"

Bernardi grew pale to the lips. "You must explain yourself more clearly, Rost—"

"More clearly? Willingly. You have debts, mon ami, even if no frivolous ones; you have no rich aunt or uncle who can give you a fortune, and although your father possesses all possible virtues he has no earthly property. Still more plainly," he added, questioningly. "Many things certainly seem difficult for you to understand; otherwise in Ratenow's constrained conduct toward you, you would have seen the universal opinion which prevails with regard to your relations in this hospitable house. I certainly do not know how far you have gone nor whether you can still draw back. You are certain of my sympathy if it be true that it is no longer possible."

Without another word he stepped past his friend, and went up to Elsie, who was still listening to the children's

chatter. She had laid the book on the table, and was once more in the midst of her happy thoughts.

"I have the honor of this dance, Fräulein," said the young officer, and with a few jesting words he led her into the hall. Bernardi had remained behind in a painful state of mind; with a frown on his face he sauntered through into the next room, and stopped in the door-way near Moritz. Truly, the otherwise so charming man was strikingly cool to him. It had gone so far then that every one was talking of it!

He stood there stroking his mustache, and mused over his entire connection: Rost was right; there was neither a rich uncle nor aunt.

"Oh, ho! My dear colonel!" struck his ear, "that is a matter of opinion."

Frau von Ratenow had spoken in a loud and threatening tone.

He turned around and looked into his host's room. The old lady was sitting at the first whist table opposite the colonel of the regiment. She was rapidly dealing the cards, and her face had exactly the stern expression which was peculiar to her when she was preparing for a contest in defense of any one of her opinions.

"That is your idea," she repeated, "but it is not mine! I have already seen too much unhappiness arise from this so-called propriety. I will relate an instance to you at once."

She had finished dealing and now laid her folded hands upon the cards. It suddenly occurred to Bernardi that she was speaking in such a loud tone merely because she had perceived him there in the door-way. Involuntarily he assumed an attentive attitude.

"She was my friend, colonel; surely you must have known Major von Welsleben and his wife? Well, they became acquainted and fell in love with each other when they were almost children; you will say, colonel, that at

that age the prose of life is not taken into consideration. Very well! then we should draw the attention of young people to the fact that it is their duty to rouse themselves from their moonlight idyls of 'love in a cottage' and look around at real life and to acknowledge that they can not exist entirely upon love and the perfume of roses. Well, they became engaged; it was an endless engagement; he a morose man, she a nervous girl, till at last the clergyman blessed a sorry marriage. Now it is coming, colonel! You see you maintained a little while ago that the proper thing for him to do was to become engaged to the girl because he had shown her so plainly that he loved her! A perverted propriety, my dear sir! My old Johann, who has been thirty-two years in my house, and who is not exactly one of the cleverest, said to me one evening as he was laying the table, 'Madame, this cloth can not be used—if I draw it over here, then it falls down there; if I push it that way then the table shows this side. I have been bothering with the thing for a whole hour!' That was the way with the Welslebens; they have been pulling the table-cloth this way and that all their lives, but it has never reached far enough. Children came; they were more and more straitened; demands poured in from every quarter; it was long since there had been joy in the house; even when the bell rang the wife would start with fear because she supposed it might be one of the bills which had been presented, oh, so often, and never paid. She took poor care of herself and grew delicate, and then the husband found things more to his liking in the club. Now I ask you, my dear sir, where—"

Bernardi listened no longer; he suddenly appeared before Frieda and asked her to waltz. She declined.

"My dear Bernardi, take pity upon Fräulein Annie Cramm." He bowed and left the room.

Elsie's brown eyes were looking for something—Lieutenant von Rost knew perfectly well what it was; the little

one made him unspeakably sorry, as sorry as anything could make him. He would gladly have given Bernardi a few thousand thalers if he had been able so that the little feet might trip along life's pathway by his side. "'Pon honor, she was charming!"

In the meantime Bernardi was striding up and down the garden in furious haste. "If you can draw back"—the words rang in his ears. He felt dizzy; it seemed as if he could strangle the man who had uttered them; but it was true they were all in the right, and that was the devilish part of it. Could he still draw back without a sensation? Yes, he did not yet break his word, his spoken word—in an hour, perhaps, it would have been said. Nevertheless, she must have read in his eyes a thousand times as he had seen it in her child-like brown ones that they loved each other with all their hearts.

What a prospect, to be sure! The old lady's description was so horribly cheerless, so frightfully true; a miserable prospect! He pushed his hair back from his forehead. A song had suddenly come into his mind, the simple words:

"Es braust durch die Lande der herbstliche Wind,
Untreu ward der Liebste mir armen Kind!"

and he saw again the picture that he had seen a little while before, and the weeping girl assumed the form of Elsie von Hegebach. No! he could no longer draw back, and he did not want to; he could not live if Elsie von Hegebach considered him such a pitiful, faithless fellow. He had held her hand in his in that blissful moment, and he thought too sacredly of love, too highly of women—there must be some way; if it came to the worst he could leave the service. Instantly, with long quick strides, he went into the house and through the hall to the card-room.

"Madame," bowing before the elder Frau von Rate-now, "may I beg for a few moments' conversation with you?"

He spoke in a low tone and looked calmly into the clever face which was turned toward him in surprise.

She did not answer immediately, but she laid down the cards. "Go over to my room, I will meet you there," she returned just as softly; it was well that the others were so busy conversing with each other and that the music had just begun again.

Frau von Ratenow looked after him as he disappeared behind the *portières*. "Now for it!" she said to herself. "My dear judge, will you take my cards for a quarter of an hour? Yes? thank you!" then, choosing the way through the ball-room she followed the young man to her room; it was only illuminated by one quickly lighted wax candle, and through this dusk she beheld a grave white face.

"Well, dear Bernardi?"

"Madame, a little while ago you pronounced a hard sentence upon—the—" he hesitated.

"I know what you mean," she nodded. "You surely do not wish to make me take back what I said?"

It sounded like a jest, but her eyes were serious, almost stern.

"Madame does not think it possible, then, that there could be exceptions?" he asked.

"No!" she returned briefly, seating herself in the nearest chair.

"Not even when a strong, honest purpose is united to a heart full of true love?"

He spoke with deep emotion; and the old lady looked at him—almost compassionately.

"Merciful Heaven! they have all thought that; they have all believed it; that is such an easy calculation which you lovers are fond of making."

"I would leave the army, madame. It is true, so much is demanded from our profession—for the sake of appear-

ances; it is a deplorable lot, that of the poor officers. I would never offer it to Elsie von Hegebach. I—”

“Elsie von Hegebach!” Frau von Ratenow arose and stepped toward the young man in her rustling silk gown. “If you mean Elsie von Hegebach I can only say to you she is a poor girl and would never permit a man to give up his profession on her account in order to drag out a dissatisfied and disappointed existence with her! She is far too discreet for that, my dear Bernardi; and I entertain the firm conviction with regard to you that you will be honorable enough not to make such a proposal to a child who does not yet understand what it means to bind herself forever. Until now she has not known the cares of life.”

She had spoken vehemently, and now continued, “Do you believe, then, that you when you have pulled off your gray coat will be able to live like a day-laborer? Nowadays people are pampered too much for that, from their youth up. Go on, Bernardi. I should not have deemed you so irrational!”

“I love Fräulein von Hegebach,” he responded, looking steadily into the excited face.

“Of course! you have plunged in headlong. I have seen it coming, unfortunately!”

“And I am loved in return!”

“Yes?” The old lady tossed her cap-ribbons back impatiently. “What does such a child know of love? Don’t say anything more to me about that, Bernardi; at that age one has no judgment, and even if—”

“And even if?” he repeated, “Madame, and even if?”

“Well, then, she will forget it, Bernardi! Oh, no, no,” she continued, “don’t do anything so mad! I will believe that you have fallen in love with the little one, she is a pretty girl; but—you’ll not die of it! I must beg you in all seriousness, my dear Lieutenant Bernardi, to consider this conversation at an end. It is an impossibility;

and neither your parents nor Elsie's father, neither I nor my son, would be pleased with it. I can not produce any expressions of great honor—and so on; you know I esteem you for a charming officer, Bernardi, and an honorable man; don't make the child unhappy. I mean well by you and by her."

"I do not break any given word with Fräulein von Hegebach; far be it from me to wish her unhappiness. Accept my thanks, madame." He bowed formally and would have stepped through the door.

"Stop, Bernardi, I can not let you go so!" exclaimed Frau von Raténow, turning so quickly that the sparkle of her diamonds flashed through the dusky room. "First the promise that you will not approach the child any more!"

"I shall leave the town as soon as possible, madame."

"Thank you, dear Bernardi."

When she had closed the door behind him she stood a long time in the same spot with bowed head, then she lightly brushed her hand over her forehead as if she wished to drive away unpleasant thoughts.

"Pardon me, my friends," she said a few moments afterward in the card-room, "I am again at your disposal; how is this? We have made nothing, judge?"

So the evening and the night passed away. They had danced together once more. He had been very merry, the young ladies thought; the men alleged that he had consoled himself with the champagne more than was absolutely necessary. The rose-colored bow which had floated before his feet as Elsie danced past him had been put into his pocket. He had once more clasped the trembling little hands in his own and then had withdrawn with his bravest bow and without another look into the longing eyes; outside in the street he had thrust his arm into Lieutenant von Rost's.

"For Heaven's sake, don't go home yet!" he exclaimed

in a loud voice; and so the whole troop of unmarried men went to the club.

"Well," said Dolling to Lieutenant von Rost, and motioning to Bernardi, who was talking in loud tones with one of his older comrades as if he were trying to drown an inward voice, "what has happened?"

"Eh," replied the other, "he has reached the crisis, but he will certainly pull through all right!"

"Oh, auntie, don't go to sleep yet," begged Elsie, who had put on her morning-gown and was sitting on the edge of the old lady's bed.

"My darling, tell me what it is," said the strangely perverse old aunt with the child-like heart.

"I love him so unutterably!" whispered the pure, girlish lips. She said no more; they only pressed each other's hands in silence.

The morning following such a feast is the same everywhere; tired faces among the women, a little headache for the men, the rooms not yet quite in order, the servants sleepy; the best is always the breakfast.

It was nearly twelve when they assembled in the dining-room for this repast. Frau von Ratenow was criticising severely; she was evidently not in the best humor. Frieda yawned a great deal, and Aunt Lotte dwelt in reminiscences and accurately described each toilet.

"Where is Elsie?" Moritz asked at last; until that moment he had eaten in almost absolute silence.

"She is coming directly," Aunt Lotte assured him. "She wanted to dress herself for the street first; she is going to see her father, he is not very well."

"I believe that!" exclaimed the old Frau von Ratenow.

"Didn't the child look lovely, cousin?" asked Aunt Lotte.

"Oh, yes!" was the cool reply. "By the way, when are the lessons to begin?"

"Not just yet," answered Moritz, quietly. "I intend

to wait until Easter for that; and now I want to make a proposal to you, Aunt Lotte. Suppose you turn your system about this year and go to your cloister now for the prescribed eight weeks, and take Elsie with you?"

Aunt Lotte had instantly grown deadly pale. "Go away now!" she stammered. "When Elsie is so— I beg of you, Moritz—"

"It does not suit me at all," exclaimed Frieda. "I should have preferred to have the little girls learn to sit still at least."

"Oh, yes, Frieda!" cried Aunt Lotte, more tragically than ever. "Use your influence! If the child were to go now it would be a death-blow to her happiness!"

The young wife laughed clearly and merrily. "Auntie, you deserve, while you are still alive, to have a monument erected to you under a weeping willow and surrounded with roses."

"Hearts and sorrows can not always be made to agree, Cousin Lotte!" exclaimed Frau von Ratenow with her voice raised; "it would be infinitely painful to me if you had rendered assistance in matters which we, with our whole strength, have tried to undermine."

The old lady's face grew pale.

"I have done nothing at all, Ratenowchen," she said, earnestly and positively. "No one could bring about such a thing; that is a miracle sent by God: it comes—"

"It comes," Frieda interrupted, still laughing,

"Es kommt wie Nelkenduft im Winde,
Es kommt wie durch die Nacht gelinde,
Aus Wolken bricht des Mondes Schein!"

"Well, yes, of course," exclaimed Frau von Ratenow, "that is very fine to write in an album; in this world it depends upon something else: however, do not trouble yourselves, she can remain quietly at home and will be reasonable."

"How often a girl's happiness has been wrecked with words like that," Aunt Lotte murmured.

"It is not exactly a subject for laughter, Frieda!" and the old lady's eyes were raised reproachfully to the beautiful laughing face of her daughter-in-law.

That young lady was on the point of replying, when the folds of the *portière* were drawn aside and Elsie entered. Her whole being seemed elevated; one could see it in the shining brown eyes and in the rosy cheeks: her 'Good-morning' sounded so fresh and cordial it was as if a merry sunbeam had floated through the room.

"Your father is not well?" Frau von Ratenow asked, kindly.

"Alas, no, dear aunt; directly after breakfast I am going to see him."

"It is thawing," warned Moritz. "You should wear thick boots."

"And when you are back, Elsie, come to my room," added Frau von Ratenow.

"A letter from Lieutenant Bernardi."

The servant had stepped up to Moritz and delivered a note to him.

Aunt Lotte felt her hand suddenly siezed by a little trembling hand.

Moritz read with a strange expression: he read it again, then said, without looking at anybody:

"Lieutenant Bernardi sends his adieus to every one; he regrets deeply his inability to present them in person, but unfortunately time will not allow him to do so. He starts at six o'clock this evening for H——, where he has received a command in place of a comrade who has fallen ill; he requests that his violin and also his music be given to the bearer of this note, and hopes that the ladies have recovered from the fatigue of yesterday and that all may hold him in friendly remembrance."

"Bring the violin from the salon," was Moritz's order.

Then he took one of his visiting-cards from his notebook, wrote a few words in pencil, put it into an envelope and handed it to the servant who had just returned.

“Our adieus to Lieutenant Bernardi!”

The brown eyes gazed after the violin-case, which was just disappearing behind the *portières*. It had grown so still; nothing was heard but the faint clatter of the knives and forks.

“An angel is flying through the room,” they say.

This time it was an angel of death who broke off a beautiful half-opened flower which had just begun to bloom so blessedly in a young heart.

At last Moritz tried to say something; he compelled himself to look into the white young face there by his side.

“Now, Elsie, shall we go to town? Shall we see about the children’s school-books?”

Involuntarily he moved his hand toward her across the table.

“Well, we have sat here long enough, children; gesegnete Mahlzeit!”

Frau von Ratenow arose, and Elsie left the room; she went to fetch her wrap, she said, in a low voice.

“For mercy’s sake, the poor child!” sobbed Aunt Lotte. “She loves him; they are in love with each other.”

“Bernardi is a prudent man,” Frau von Ratenow exclaimed. “Don’t weep! I tell you, Lotte,” she continued, “I have long known that it would come to this; but an old woman like me has old-fashioned ideas. Now it has gone so far.”

“Good-morning,” cried Frieda, “I am going to dress. Too bad that Bernardi is going to leave: our lovely *musicales*!”

She vanished into the next room, and Moritz listened as she sang, and chatted lovingly with her little son.

“Moritz,” said Frau von Ratenow, “in the goldsmith Thomas’s window there is a little enameled bangle; two or

three days ago Elsie saw it and was very much taken with it; buy it. You pay for it, and I will give you the money afterward. Now, then, good-morning."

"Pray, go upstairs, Aunt Lotte, and look after the girl," Moritz begged, nervously.

"Is everything over, then?" asked the weeping little lady; "everything?"

"But, auntie, dearest, it can not be otherwise."

She turned away and dried her eyes, then slowly mounted the stairs.

Elsie sat at the window looking into the garden. The snow had melted and fallen from the trees, and the wet and black branches were being tossed hither and thither by the wind; the heavens were covered with gray clouds, while a driving rain shut in the view of the country.

Aunt Lotte busied herself with her tiled stove, for the girl must not be permitted to see that she was weeping; and she took a cloth and rubbed it over the polished furniture upon which there was not the least particle of dust. She wanted to say something, but she did not know what.

The door of the young girl's bedroom was standing open, and in her perplexity the old lady went in there.

There stood the dainty bed with its white curtains, and the little mother-of-pearl crucifix hanging at the head. She had brought it back with her from the Herrnhuter parish. In the corner by the stove was the doll's cabinet, filled with the pretty toys saved from her childhood's days; and on the table, under the mirror, was yesterday's half-faded bouquet carefully placed in water. The sound of the ticking of the clock came from the next room. Aside from that, it was uncomfortably still.

Then she heard a door opened, and Moritz's voice, as gentle as if he were speaking to a child:

"Elsie, Elsie! how you look. What is the matter?"

"With me? Nothing at all, Moritz."

"You are our good, sensible little girl, Elsie."

She jumped up from her chair.

“Don’t say anything. Hush, Uncle Moritz,” she cried; and, going past Aunt Lotte, who had just entered, and had stretched out both hands to her, she closed the door of her own room behind her.

He turned to the window.

“How this grieves me, Aunt Lotte! There she goes,” he said, after awhile; “she has on her hat and mantle. I ought not to have let her start all alone. Where is she going, auntie? She is turning off to the left through the garden.”

“She always goes that way to the cemetery, Moritz; it is nearer, you know; she takes the little path past St. Gertrude’s chapel.”

She was in fact going there. For the moment she hardly had any decided purpose; the snow was already very soft, and the walking tiresome. All at once she was so tired, so fearfully tired.

Not far from the entrance to the cemetery she saw Annie Cramm coming toward her. That young lady was carrying her skates over her arm, and seemed to be in a great hurry as she came across the road in her elegant skating costume.

“Good-morning, Elsie; how do you do?”

She cast a searching glance at the girl’s white face, from under her veil.

“Thank you, Annie, very well,” she responded.

“Are you going to the cemetery? Gracious! what dismal thoughts for the morning after such gayety!”

Elsie only nodded.

“I will go as far as the gate with you, if you will allow me. You know, of course, that you have become a very celebrated personage since last night,” she chattered, as they walked. “Papa came home from the club a little while ago, and, fancy! he related as the greatest bit of news—I laughed till I was half dead—that Bernardi had

exchanged with Lieutenant P—— on your account, because he had received a refusal from either your aunt or yourself, I don't know which. I said directly, 'Such nonsense! Bernardi!' Now, you know too, Elsie, and will not be vexed with me for saying it; he certainly can not marry any poor girl."

The girl's brown eyes were turned upon the speaker with such a sad and mournful expression that she was startled and stopped speaking, changing her skates from her left hand to her right.

"Well, good-bye, Elsie," she said, finally; "perhaps I will come to see you this afternoon. My regards to Frau von Ratenow."

Then she stood by the grave and gazed at it; it was so cold and silent; it was only a grave that lay there, dead. There was no one in the church-yard except a prying little robin redbreast, which was perched near by, and stared at her with round, curious eyes. Never had it been so hard for her to realize the meaning of this grave, as in this hour. The feeling of devotion would not come, as she had always felt it before, when she stayed here.

"Why do I live? Why didn't they lay me here with her long ago?" was the cry of her soul.

"You will take cold here, *fräulein*," said the old gravedigger, who, with his hands in his pockets, came slowly toward her in his wooden shoes. "There is nothing to see now, *fräulein*; but in the spring it will be pretty here; then the blue crocuses which you planted will be up."

She went back and turned into the town; there was still her grumbling old father, and he was ill; she had entirely forgotten it during these last hours—these dreadful hours. On the street she met Lieutenant von Rost, who, as he caught a glimpse of her was startled, she looked so white and bowed so absently; he stood still for a moment looking after the slender, girlish figure, then went on, softly whistling—he always whistled when anything troubled him.

“It’s a good thing you have come, Elschen. Oh! your father, your father!” old Siethmann whispered to the young girl in the hall. “We can’t do anything with him since yesterday, when the messenger brought the thick letter, and, more than that, a little while ago, Herr von Hegebach sent in his name, and now he is furious!”

Elsie went into the room, and up to the old man. He was sitting in his arm-chair by the window, his pipe lay on the table, and in his hand he held a rumped letter.

“So you have come at last, Elsie. I might perish and die here, and still it is all on your account that I have this vexation with this cursed business!”

She made no reply to the unjust reproach.

“I will stay with you, papa, if you would like to have me,” she said, after a pause.

“No; I don’t want that at all; you know that can not be. But I must talk with you; you must know that there is no more justice, that they brought beggary back to me again yesterday, because—well, because it is I. If the Bennewitzer were I, and I were he, then of course the bread would not fall on the buttered side.”

Elsie was silent; her head ached, and she was utterly indifferent to anything that might happen now.

“But may the devil take me if I leave the thing where it is! I will go further, even if I have to carry it to the Supreme Court of the empire, and starve in consequence! And what do you think?” he continued, striking the table with his clinched hand, “this man, who has no more right to the estate than I have, has again offered me charity, and sends me word that he will see me himself to-day! Would you have believed such a thing possible? He ought to come; Siethmann had better show him in; I am in precisely the right mood!”

Ah! wasn’t it horrible, comfortless, and desolate in the world? In the world where everything only turned upon possessions; in the world where even the purest and noblest

feeling of the heart must yield to the most paltry interests! The girl loathed wealth and the power of money; her faith, her love, her ideal had all been trodden in the dust; and must she live so?

She put both hands up to her temples as the old man began to scold again.

"Papa, let it go!" she begged. "It is all the same. I need nothing."

Both were silent. Elsie stood by the stove and looked around the cheerless, smoky room, mechanically listening to the dripping of the snow-water in the gutter. Occasionally some sound from the street was audible.

After a few moments she heard footsteps. The house door was opened, and some one came up the stairs. She left the room.

"Please stay down-stairs, Herr von Hegebach!" she begged, softly, as she leaned over the balusters.

"Why? I must speak with my cousin."

"Papa is so excited," she returned.

"You look pale, dear fräulein. Would it be unpleasant to you if I—"

"Papa is ill, I think," she objected.

"May I speak with you, my dear fräulein?"

"With me? Oh, yes; but—"

"Where?" he continued.

"Indeed, I did not know—"

Siethmann approached, and unlocked a door.

"It is in good order and not very cold, Elschen."

The room in which they now stood was small; in the background was the old woman's store of apples, a chest painted with many-colored glaring flowers, and a cupboard, besides, two spinning-wheels and a reel, and over the whole hung the odor of the fruit. The last pale gleam of the afternoon light pierced through the window and illuminated the noble face of the Bennewitzer-Hegebach.

"I have come in order to talk with your father once

more; he is only making unnecessary agitation and expense for himself, fräulein. Do be persuaded that he will have no success with the new proceeding, and that I lament it deeply that he—”

“I have not the least influence over papa, Herr von Hegebach,” Elsie replied.

“I am sorry for that; but you can perhaps say to him that I am prepared to carry out my former proposal at any time.”

“Papa accepts no money as a gift,” was the cool answer.

“But why do you take it that way?” he asked, likewise growing cooler. “I simply offer him the interest upon capital which I am unable to draw out from the property.”

“I understand nothing, mein herr,” was her reply.

“In spite of that, you ought to defend my views to your father; in his interest and in your own, my dear little cousin.”

“In papa’s interest? He wishes nothing for himself; and, as for me, I decline with thanks.”

“Only girls of your age feel like that who do not yet know what it means.”

“To have no money? To be poor?” the young girl interrupted him questioningly, while the whole bitterness of her soul was expressed in her quivering lips. “I understand it, Herr von Hegebach; one learns that early in life. If God were just, He would not create poor girls, or at the least He would allow them to come into the world, alike without feeling and without hearts!”

He had involuntarily stepped back, staring at the little mouth that had spoken these words and which was drawn with pain.

“Whence comes this bitterness?” he asked finally; “other girls of your age only weep at the most, if a disappointment overtake them.”

“I have no cause for weeping,” she replied shortly.

“I do not like to go away so, Elsie von Hegebach,” he began after a pause; “it seems to me as if I were doing wrong to leave you in this bitter mood. Promise me, at least, to take what I said a while ago into consideration; it is no charity—it is a right which is due you.”

“I do not believe that papa—”

“But you, yourself?”

“I? Oh, I have passed the ‘teachers’ examination!” The old, hard tone again: it sounded almost scornful.

“You have your father’s obstinacy!” he said, seizing his hat. “To whom shall I turn who possesses any power over you?”

“I am afraid you will seek in vain for such a personage, Herr von Hegebach.”

“Adieu, fräulein!” She bent her head slightly—and he was gone.

When the girl was left alone she leaned her forehead against the whitewashed wall; a groan sounded through the room, and the slender form shook as if in a tempest.

“Who was there?” the old man asked sullenly, as she returned to him.

“The Bennewitzer, papa.”

“And you didn’t allow him to come to see me?”

“I told him that you were not well; he wanted to offer you the annuity once more.”

“May the devil—” exclaimed the old man, flying into a passion, “it is the surest evidence that he is standing on slippery ground.”

“Shall I stay with you, papa? Will you have some more tea?” she asked.

“No, I am going to bed; I don’t feel well.”

“Let me stay with you then!” She had stepped close up to him in the darkness and now her hands lay on his shoulder.

“Eh, what is it, Elsie? See, what would you do here?” It sounded almost gentle.

"I often think I belong to you, papa."

"Yes, yes! However, then I ought not to be a beggar, child!"

"Couldn't it be arranged in some way, papa?"

She received no answer.

"Just see, Elsie," he said finally, "the Bennewitzer has neither chick nor child, and if it had only happened right, then you would have had everything—yes—but because you are a girl—it stands exactly so in the base will; daughters are entirely cut off from the inheritance—"

She knelt down by him and laid her head on his hand.

"And," he continued, "it still frets me every day that you are not a boy—not on my account—on yours—your mother cried with horror because you were a girl. Her last words were 'Oh! a girl, a poor little girl!' " and now it is so; you must see yourself how it has turned out, child. But promise me—one thing—when I am dead. I have certainly done nothing to make you love me very much—Aunt Ratenow and Moritz—but one can't choose one's father in this world, Elsie."

"No, papa, and I can't help it that I am a poor girl," she said, like a child, and two big tears fell on the old man's hand.

"Well, child, don't cry, don't cry!" He was nervous again already. "You must go now, Elsie, it will soon be dark."

She rose and looked for her coat and hat. "Good-night, papa; if I have time I will come again soon. I am to begin the lessons to-morrow."

Once more she went through the dark, muddy street; at other times she had always been afraid at this hour, but to-day she did not even think of it. The wind had risen and was rushing down the long avenue and the fine rain penetrated through her veil cooling her cheeks and eyes. She walked as slowly as though it were a May evening. Suddenly a carriage turned out of the Burg gate and drove

rapidly past her; it was the Bennewitzer's trap. So he had at all events paid Aunt Ratenow a visit, perhaps in order to find an ally in her.

"If I could die, then it would be well for me," flashed through her mind. She was obliged to go into the house and she would so much rather run away as far as her feet could carry her.

"Fräulein, will you be kind enough to go directly to Frau von Ratenow," said the servant at the door. She gave him her hat and coat and went in.

Frau von Ratenow was sitting on the sofa; a bottle with two glasses stood on the table and the odor of a fine cigar still lingered in the air.

"How is your father?" she asked, motioning to the girl to take a seat.

"Thank you, he is moderately well."

"You look pale; that is caused by dancing, Elsie."

"Yes, aunt."

"See! here comes the little white mouse," said the old lady, laughing at the dainty maiden who came solemnly through the room toward Elsie, with an expression of great consequence.

"From grandmamma, auntie," she whispered and laid a small, heavy object in her lap, then ran quickly back to her place of concealment. It was a smooth hoop of black enamel which Elsie held in her hand.

"You are so good, dear aunt," she said, looking at her with the beautiful brown eyes; they had been no longer child's eyes since the morning; and she kissed the proffered hand: "I shall wear it as a token of your love."

"I wanted to ask you to do so, Elsie. Now you may go—by the way—the Bennewitzer left his regards for you."

When she got to her own little room she laid the bracelet away; she wished for no pity, she felt she could not endure it. As if a little bit of a toy or an ornament could take away her heartache and the insupportable longing. She

would gladly have stayed alone, but then they would think she was crying about him, and she would not shed a single tear on that account, not one.

But it happened nevertheless. All at once she was conscious of a sweet perfume, the fragrance which had floated about her so deliciously yesterday. There were the violets, his violets, and it seemed as if they spoke with his voice.

“Happiness—is not this moment happiness?” she suddenly sobbed aloud, it sounded like a cry of pain, and the next instant the sitting-room door was opened and Aunt Lotte held the trembling girl in her arms. Aunt Lotte knew all. She could be permitted to see that her heart was broken, wholly broken.

CHAPTER IX.

ABOUT a fortnight had passed, when one morning Aunt Lotte came down the stairs and asked for Moritz. He was with his wife, the servant reported, and the old lady stepped through Frieda’s blue salon and asked, as she stood by the *portières*: “Do I disturb you, child?”

“Always come in, Aunt Lotte,” called Moritz. Frieda sat at her writing desk. “Just a moment, aunt,” she begged, and she read over again a dainty letter, ornamented with a crest.

“MY DEAREST LILI,—Only a few words in great haste, in order that you may be *au fait* with regard to my ball toilet for Berlin; as we shall naturally be much together, I have ordered at Gerson’s a white satin gown with silver embroidery, the corsage of ‘*drap d’argent*,’ and shall wear my diamonds instead of flowers; I think it will be more *distingué*. Moritz and mamma insist upon it that Elsie shall go with us; lately she has grown more than tiresome (*à cause de Monsieur Bernardi*). Mamma will send her in a pink silk frock. I have by this time had enough of this

Elizabeth worship and shall plainly express my opinion to Moritz. I beg you, Lili, with all my heart, never to take a young girl into your house, who has, as it were, family privileges; it is more than horrible, especially when the master of the house feels himself bound to play the part of the father and at the same time that of the knight, as Moritz does. My patience will not hold out much longer. Love to mother and father—Auf wiederschen,

“Your sister,

“FRIEDA.”

P.S.—The Bennewitzer comes remarkably often nowadays. On this point I have no confidence in my mother-in-law; she says it is for the sake of Elsie's father. As for that, there is an old adage, which, however, I will not write here.

F.”

“Well, auntie, what is the trouble?” she asked after she had addressed and sealed the letter. She went up to a pretty little cabinet, drew out all the drawers and prepared to make an inspection of her jewels. She wore a light-blue morning gown and had a little lace cap with blue bows on her luxuriant black hair.

“Oh! dear,” Aunt Lotte commenced, turning to Moritz, who sat motionless before the fireplace, in a gray cloth coat and top-boots, as he had come in from the farm. “Oh dear, Moritz, my heart is ready to break about Elsie. She does not complain, she says nothing, she does not sleep, she eats nothing at all and she is growing so thin; won't you send the doctor up to me when he comes? I am afraid she will grieve herself sick over this Bernardi.”

“Is not the comedy at an end yet?” asked Frieda. “What does she want? Elsie seems to be perfectly satisfied; it is natural that she should feel a little shy about going out, as she was the talk of the town for a week.”

“Yes, she bears it very well, Frieda,” said the old lady, nodding her head earnestly, “but—”

“Well! you all do enough to console her,” Frieda continued with irritation, and laying a costly gem in its case a trifle roughly. “Nobody asks any more if anything suits *me*, but it is always Elsie. Mamma does it, so do the children and Moritz as well; I am no longer able to say what I want and how I wish it. Soon I shall not speak a single word at the table.”

Aunt Lotte looked at Moritz with perfect horror as he leaned back in his chair so calmly.

“You see, aunt, Frieda knows it is very becoming to her to pout a little. But you must not inflict that dreadful caprice upon me in Berlin, child, for—”

“If you insist upon Elsie’s going too, then I will stay at home, with my ill-humor.”

“You must settle that with mother,” he rejoined, quietly. “It was her desire that Elsie should accompany us.”

“Then I can not go, on account of the children,” his wife persisted; “anyway I can not conceive why I have a governess if I am not able to leave home once in a while in peace.”

“Until now the old head nurse has been able to take the responsibility. But just as you like, Frieda, I have never yet disputed with you when you were pleased to be obstinate, you know that. To-day is the last in which Elsie shall officiate as governess, this very hour I will take steps toward engaging some one else.”

Frieda was silent and slowly closed one drawer after the other.

“I make only one request, Frieda,” he began again, “don’t let the girl suspect why this arrangement is made—we will see about the rest.” He had risen, and now taking up his cap and riding whip from the chair he left the room. In the same instant his young wife covered her face with her hands and burst into tears.

“Oh! Aunt Lotte, I am so awfully unhappy!”

The whole scene was entirely beyond the comprehension of the good old lady.

“For Heaven’s sake, Frieda, what is the matter?”

“He no longer loves me!” sobbed the beautiful woman, throwing herself into a chair. “I know only too well that he does not love me any more!”

“Good gracious, surely you are not jealous—?” The whole word would not cross the lips of the terrified old lady.

“And now he has gone to mamma—to mamma who always treats me as if I were an unreasonable child!”

Suddenly she jumped up; the blue *portières* separated and Frau von Ratenow, in all her dignity, crossed the threshold.

“Well, Frieda! I have just heard from Moritz that you are not feeling well,” she began, sitting down by her weeping daughter.

Frieda stammered out something about headache.

“Of course!” The old lady took her hand. “It is too much for you, this noise and tumult of the children all day long; nowadays it is the fashion to have nerves. I will, however, make a proposition to you: send the little girls to school, then there will be a heavenly quiet in the house, my daughter, and you need not bother yourself any longer about a governess. What do you think of it?”

The young woman rose quickly from her reclining position in the arm-chair, but she made no reply.

“Elsie Hegebach will remain in the house as my companion, dear child,” continued the old lady, with a raised voice, “and as such I shall know how to protect her from all mortification, Frieda!”

Frieda had grown slightly pale. “I did not mean it that way,” she said, weeping again.

“Where is Elsie?” asked the mother-in-law.

“In the nursery; she is giving an arithmetic lesson,” was the reply, spoken in a low tone.

“I hope you will all take tea with me this evening,”

continued Frau von Ratenow. "Aunt Lotte, be on time, please; the Bennewitzer will be there."

"The third time in a fortnight!" remarked Frieda, rising. "He never used to come, or any way very seldom."

"Certainly! For years he had an invalid wife, and until now he has been in deep mourning. Shall I have the pleasure of seeing you this evening?" she asked again.

"I regret exceedingly, mamma, but we are to take tea with Frau von Z——"

"Elsie also?"

"She was invited, but declined."

"Well, it is to be hoped she will not refuse me!" And the old lady nodded to her daughter-in-law in the most friendly manner. "Good-bye, my sweet child; send the little ones for awhile, if you are willing."

"Now don't you see, auntie, mamma is always like that!" complained Frieda. "Every one will concede this point; if Elsie has undertaken to instruct the children, she ought to do it thoroughly; I am the last one who would demand anything unreasonable from her. If my patience has given out it is no wonder. I think that at last the little girls are learning something, then Moritz comes and says: 'Elschen, we are going to the subscription ball in Berlin; mother intends to give you a new gown for it.' How can she be devoted and earnest?"

"I do not think that Elsie wanted to accept your kindness, Frieda," said the agitated old lady, defending her protégée. She was, however, still obliged to listen to a long lament. Frieda was so injured on all sides. She meant to do as she had said, and not utter a syllable at the table.

Long ago there had been signs of a thunder-storm in Moritz's matrimonial heaven, and now it had burst upon them, a sultry atmosphere pervaded the house in spite of the clear, frosty weather out of doors. Elsie did not notice it; she always had one of the little girls on either side of

her, and was sufficiently occupied in answering their questions.

At first Moritz had not wished to have the children come to the table; but Elsie had thought it best for them, and so it had been allowed, to the great joy of the little ones.

“Yes, really; she did look ill, and she was quiet too; that all came from her struggles with a proud, grieved heart; the eternal mute question, “Why has it come to me?” That brought the sleepless nights and the tormenting longing for the lost golden days; she seemed to herself like a pariah among all the rest, comfortless and thrust forth, and only because she was poor. The brown eyes could not weep as they say in the song of “Poor Mägdlein.” Ah! of course there was still a great deal left in the world which made life worth living; hundreds and hundreds shared her fate and were finally calm and contented with hard work—without happiness. But they had all trodden a path of nettles, of thorns, in order to reach that point; a tired, unhappy young heart can not be rocked into the sleep of oblivion in a few days; long, long years are needed for that!

In the evening the most comfortable room in the whole house was Frau von Ratenow's parlor; the porcelain stove crackled and sung in every key, the heavy curtains were drawn together before the windows, keeping out all draughts, and were laid in proud folds upon the thick, soft carpet; the lamp-light was reflected in the silver and crystal on the snow-white damask cloth, while Aunt Lotte and Frau von Ratenow were seated upon the sofa, the latter with her knitting in her hands. Elsie, busied with her work, sat near a small table, upon which the silver kettle was steaming; she wore a dark house-dress with a dainty little embroidered apron. The Bennewitzer was expected.

To Elsie these hours with the Bennewitzer were nearly unendurable. She had such mixed feelings with regard to him. Since her father recently had spoken his first kind

words to her, her childlike heart was filled with affection for the sullen man. She knew that he did not treat his cousin justly, but he had said that he did it for her sake, and that annulled everything in the girl's eyes: his ill humor, his obstinacy, his small interest in her. He had, long since, again become as inaccessible to her as formerly, but she had once had a glimpse of his embittered heart, and now no word was too harsh for her, no mood too gloomy; it was only the dross of trouble and loneliness over the gold in the heart of the old man; he was nevertheless her father, the one being upon whom she had a claim, an inviolable claim.

For this reason the Bennewitzer was a torment to her; it is true that until now he had never mentioned her father, during his visits at the Burg; but in spite of that she knew what he thought of him and what Aunt Ratenow's opinion was, and the knowledge made her unspeakably miserable. Besides, Aunt Ratenow praised the Bennewitzer so extraordinarily; Aunt Ratenow always had such strong, outspoken likes and dislikes, and one dared not object to them, for the old lady could never be convinced.

"Good or bad, there is nothing between them!" she was accustomed to say. She recognized no middle course; it was foreign to her whole nature. Bernardi's name had never again been upon her lips; the thing was settled once for all; the less it was spoken of, so much the better! A wound must bleed, she supposed; but that could be done in silence without people's observing it.

"Elsie," she began, in her deep voice. She pushed her spectacles back and let her newspaper drop. "You may read that to me; my eyes grow worse every day. I do not know, Lottchen, how you have preserved yours so well, with your everlasting reading. It is a real comfort to me that Moritz has granted my request, and taken the instruction of the children away from you, Elsie. Actually, I am neither able to read the newspaper in the morning nor

even to write a letter without making positive crow's tracks."

Elsie took up the paper. "If I only had the comfort of knowing, dear aunt, that Moritz and Frieda were not dissatisfied with my efforts as governess."

"Aha, that is the way they question people when they want to hear something fine," returned the old lady. "No, no, it is true I made the request of Moritz! What do you mean? What more could there be than what appears on the surface? Here comes the Bennewitzer," she exclaimed, interrupting herself. A carriage had rolled across the court and stopped before the entrance; steps were heard in the vestibule, and Frau von Ratenow rose with a certain ceremony.

"Good-evening, my dear Hegebach!" she exclaimed, shaking his hand vigorously, "I am glad you are willing to while away the time a little with us three lone women."

He kissed the outstretched hand gallantly, and saluted Aunt Lotte and Elsie. To the latter he handed a little white paper cornucopia. "The only one which was in bloom in the hot-house," he said, politely. It was a superb Maréchal Niel, the graceful stem bending under the weight of the beautiful yellow flower.

"Thank you very much, Herr von Hegebach!" She put the rose into a little vase, and busied herself about the tea-table.

"Nothing new, dear Hegebach?" asked Frau von Ratenow, and with that they were in conversation. Both knew the whole country round about, and from the present they went back to the old days. "I beg your pardon, my dear Hegebach, I am ten years older than you, exactly your cousin's age. I know that to a certainty."

"No, you are mistaken, madame," he answered, quietly, "at the most you are eight years older; I was thirty-six when I married, and eighteen years have passed since that time. Imagine! my eldest boy was already a senior."

“Positively, how time flies, Hegebach!”

“Truly, truly. Elsie will be nineteen in the spring,” Aunt Lotte calculated.

“Well! there are older people than ourselves, Hegebach; you are a young man yet,” said Frau von Ratenow.

Aunt Lotte glanced at him; he looked stately and distinguished, and also strong, but young. She had not been young for a long time, and she could not count many more years either. Men had altogether too much advantage in that respect, she thought.

Elsie sat among them in silence, her thoughts far away. What did she care for old stories of long ago? That was all so far off, so infinitely far back in the mist of the past. A tormenting, nervous restlessness took possession of her, as it had often done before; she would have been so glad to go up to her own little room, to sit by the window and think and dream—it was so frightfully hard not to yield to the sad, longing thoughts—just to answer, only to listen.

“How is your father?” asked the Bennewitzer, leaning toward Elsie, over the arm of his chair.

“Tolerably well, I believe, thank you,” she replied.

“And not yet inclined to be more charitable?” He said it gently, and his dark eyes looked into hers with a beseeching expression. She blushed suddenly. “Papa does not alter his opinions in a night,” she said, calmly and distinctly.

Frau von Ratenow’s face darkened. “Elsie, will you be kind enough to order the tea?”

The young girl rose, stepped noiselessly over the soft carpet and vanished into the adjoining room. Herr von Hegebach followed her with his eyes, stroking his dark beard with his well-formed white hand.

Frau von Ratenow immediately introduced another subject, evidently wishing the harsh reply to be forgotten, and when Elsie returned to the room they were again in an animated conversation.

Herr von Hegebach was a delightful companion, for he had traveled a great deal, and was, in one way and another, connected with a multitude of people of distinction and renown. He talked of Lapland and of Lebanon, and he talked well; he had tasted of the best wherever he had been; he had wandered and sketched by the Nile, and had stood by Niagara; he was a man who was acquainted with the best side of life.

And yonder in the cheerless house sat a lonely old man who had never possessed money enough to allow him to travel simply as far as the mineral baths for his health. He might easily have spent several weeks in Teplitz for the sum which his cousin had given in Cairo for a single dagger. Those were hateful bitter thoughts which were interwoven behind Elsie's white forehead. Everything in which she had believed until now: love, fidelity, generosity, all were laughably obsolete. Nowadays only one thing brought happiness, only one thing gave power—money—wealth.

“To a speedy friendship, my dear little cousin!” The Bennewitzer lifted his glass. She took her own, and they struck them lightly together in the German fashion.

Once more her face flushed scarlet; she was vexed with herself, but his eyes had such strange glances.

“Stay here, Elsie!” Frau von Ratenow exclaimed about eleven o'clock, when the Bennewitzer had driven away, but not without having first secured the promise that the ladies would soon pay him a visit at Bennewitz. Elsie turned back and sat down again. Aunt Lotte had excused herself on the stroke of ten.

Frau von Ratenow looked angry and still did not know how to begin. “You have a remarkable manner of treating the Bennewitzer, my dear child,” she finally said; “it as a rule is ridiculous for you to bear a grudge against him on account of a foolish fancy of your father's. You should, at least, remain neutral.”

"I understand that Herr von Hegebach is entirely in the right, aunt," replied Elsie, looking straight at the old lady in astonishment. "I begrudge him nothing, that would be absurd."

"Good! but why are you so arrogant with him?"

"I beg your pardon, aunt," she faltered.

Frau von Ratenow arose and took her hand. "I don't know whether you are different from others or not; you don't belong among those whose comprehension is dull. Good-night, Elsie."

The girl flew up the stairs and into her room as if she were pursued. No! it was not possible! that was not what her aunt wanted to say, that thought which had flashed through her mind so horribly in that instant. But what was it then? On a sudden she laughed, but the laughter was scornful; it sounded strange to herself; then she went and stood before the mirror and gazed at her pallid face. Of course it was absurd; only an excited imagination could suggest such foolishness. No! aunt had not wished to say anything to her; it had only been her characteristic way of speaking.

"Aunt Lotte!" she then called softly. It seemed as if she were afraid of her own thoughts, and so she went into the old lady's painfully neat bedroom.

"What is it, my treasure?" was the sleepy answer.

"I am so frightened, auntie!"

Aunt Lotte, wide awake now, sat straight up in bed. "I have been so strongly reminded of your mother this evening, child," she commenced. "We used to sit just so, in Cousin Ratenow's salon when your father was wooing her. You look so exactly like her, Elsie, and the Bennewitzer resembles your father in some ways; his voice and the motion of the hand over the beard, you know, and then he always looked at her just so silently.

The girl was motionless; an inexplicable fear seemed to take her breath away.

“That was almost twenty years ago, Elsie, and to me it seems like yesterday,” the old lady continued in her lamenting, weeping fashion, “except that your Aunt Ratenow has grown much more stout and that my hair is perfectly white—how often the past becomes a living reality! Lieschen—your mother—came to my bed just so, and once too—I remember it distinctly—she said, ‘Lottchen, Lottchen, I am so frightened!’”

“Auntie, I pray you, I am terrified.” The slender, girlish figure, which was now standing close by the bed, was shaking with nervousness.

“You are not well, Elsie!”

“No, I really believe I shall be sick next!”

“Poor child! grief has caused it.”

“I do not mourn, auntie!”

“I well understand that, child; but one does it without wishing to. When the doctor comes to-morrow he shall give you something to make you sleep; I have already spoken to Moritz about it. Do you think I don’t notice it when you read far into the night? I hear every page you turn over. Good-night, darling, go to sleep! In old times I could stay awake so late, but now—”

CHAPTER X.

WEEKS had passed and now the spring was coming. For a long time a disagreeable east wind had been blowing, rushing along in the face of the clear blue sky and bright sunshine, which tempted people out of the house; when they were once out, however, it tossed coughs and colds at them as if by magic, leaving them to retreat in disappointment and pity the flowers which had rashly ventured forth.

Now, however, a warm fragrant spring breeze had come; gray clouds chased each other across the heavens, and rain and sunshine ruled by turns.

The buds were swelling and bursting on all the bushes, the lawn at the Burg was blue with violets, and in the cemetery, on the grave which belonged to Elsie, the crocuses were in full bloom.

Elsie had just wound a wreath around the cross which bore her mother's name. To-day was the anniversary of the mother's death, and it was also her birthday; a thorn branch in the garland of the girl's life, a dark gloomy link which bound her existence so closely with death. She sat for a long time on the stone border of the grave, her hands mechanically arranging the leaves of the wreath, while her eyes looked off over the stones and crocuses into vacancy.

At last her life had become an eternal worldly struggle with herself and with all the others; she had no one left upon whom she could rely; all had turned against her—even Moritz; she felt it. Moritz must be vexed with her, for he certainly avoided her; and Frieda was so dreadfully heartless sometimes.

"She has never had a sorrow in her life," Frau von Ratenow had said; "she is a spoiled child, and as such one should not lay it up against her any more than a grown person should be offended at the rudeness and naughtiness of children."

As for Aunt Lottie, she had suddenly set out for her cloister. One day after an interview with Cousin Ratenow she had come up stairs with red eyes and had packed her box. The severe cousin had signified that it would be better for this year if Lotte were to stay at home during the summer and spend the prescribed eight weeks in the cloister at present. Yes, and what Aunt Ratenow said must always be done.

Frieda's sister Lili was paying her a visit. She was a little brunette, not so pretty as Frieda, but with a most bewitching laugh; and she understood even better than her sister how to turn the house upside down.

Frau von Ratenow maintained that she was a new-fash-

ioned will-o'-the-wisp, and said that it was a good thing she had become so intimate with Annie Cramm, for they would make a suitable team.

However, in spite of the numerous distractions which occupied their time, Fräulein Lili was invariably to be found in "dear, delightful" Frau von Ratenow's room at the hour for tea; she was so fond of old ladies and gentlemen, and she could never fall in love with a young man. People of about fifty were her preference; and how interesting for a young woman to have an elderly husband. It was very droll when she expressed her opinions; even Frau von Ratenow was obliged to laugh, though sorely against her will.

"He must be very rich, though, mustn't he, Lili?"

"Of course, my dearest aunt; he must either be rich or else at the very least he must have a high-sounding title, must be a general or something of that sort."

The Bennewitzer came very often now, and Aunt Ratenow was more charmed with him than ever. "Elsie, he is a man of high principles!" Frieda always had a sweet smile for him, and Lili opened her eyes wider and dropped the long curling lashes more slowly than usual, when talking with him. There was a positive race whenever his handsome carriage, with the fine black horses, rolled into the court. Aunt Ratenow, with great dignity went as far as the hall to meet him, while Frieda and Lili already stood upon the stairs, and Herr von Hegebach was often really perplexed to know whether he was expected to enter Frau Frieda's boudoir or go on to Frau von Ratenow's salon. In any case, whether he turned to the right or the left he drew the whole company after him.

Elsie apparently stood outside of this little circle, and nevertheless she was indisputably conscious of being pressed more and more toward the center. She tried with all her might to win back every hand's breadth of ground which she lost; unconsciously to herself her eyes hung upon her

aunt's energetic countenance as if entreating for mercy; more and more like a frightened child she tried to shield herself from the glances of a pair of dark eyes, and yet she felt that one inch after another of her safe ground was slipping from her.

This morning a magnificent bouquet had lain among her gifts in Frau von Ratenow's room, and the visiting-card close by had named the giver; a letter from Aunt Lotte, good old Aunt Lotte had been there too. Moritz had pressed her hand and had brought her a beautiful portfolio of red Russia leather, and the children had hung upon her in great glee. Lili and Frieda had also made their appearance, the latter with various ribbons and other "rigging," as Aunt Ratenow called it, and the old lady had given back one pale blue bow with the remark that it had doubtless been brought down by mistake, and had certainly come from Frieda's toilet table, as was shown by the pin which was still sticking in it.

Oh! Elsie was so tired; it was all the same to her if Frieda did wish to smuggle in some of her old things with the others—and why shouldn't she wear cast-off bows? She had no money for this "sweet nonsense of life," as Moritz was pleased to call his young wife's costly trifles; it was only natural, after all: Frieda did not mean it unkindly. Ah! if that had been all that was demanded of her!

Aunt Ratenow had told her this morning about her birthday and how sad it was, and how since then her father had been a gloomy, lonely man, and that she had told him the child would yet be a blessing to him, a great blessing. "And it all lies in your own hands, Elsie," she had concluded.

The young girl in the silent cemetery started up suddenly; again that horrible icy feeling was creeping over her. She hurried away down the road; she never noticed the golden sunshine nor how its rays sparkled in the rain-drops which trembled on the tender leaves of the bushes.

Spring everywhere. All about her delicate green and the twittering of birds, even the old gate tower had fastened a little light green branch upon its venerable head. When she entered her father's room her cheeks were almost feverish. She meant to turn to him; he certainly hated the Bennewitzer, he would allow her to flee to him for protection if—

The old man had opened both wings of the window, the newspaper lay before him on the table, and near the cold pipe stood a half empty wine glass.

“Papa, aren't you feeling well?” asked Elsie.

“Oh, yes, my child; only the breathing, the cough—it is much better now; you may close the window again. I can no longer bear excitement, and this day—” He took her little hand in his and pressed it for a moment.

“Draw the curtain close together too, the sunshine is so hot, Elsie; and then perhaps it will please you—that little box over there was your mother's; it always stood on her sewing-table, and she had in it the little sacks and caps she made for you. I have always kept it, Elsie—take it home with you. Oh! it was so pleasant when she sat before it; that was a bright time in my life—it all comes back on such days! Once—she had been out—it was at Christmas time—and afterward, when she was again sitting by the sewing-table she said, with her eyes looking at me merrily, ‘Hegebach, I saw such a lovely rocking-horse at the saddler Lehmann's.’ Ah, Elsie! if I had only been able to buy a rocking-horse for you, then everything would have been different!”

The girl bowed her head—always the old song over again!

“And now, child”—he pushed the mahogany box toward her, with its German silver escutcheon above and the name of her dead mother, “Now—I have withdrawn my complaint against the Bennewitzer.”

“Papa!” It sounded like a cry of terror.

"Yes, child; oughtn't I to have done it? You have so often told me that I was in the wrong."

"Yes, papa, forgive me." She spoke almost hopelessly.

"And now he wished to be reconciled with me, Elsie; it was to have been a surprise for you; they wanted to come for me to-day with the carriage, and take me to the Burg so that we might all dine together with your Aunt Ratenow; but, for my part, I don't know if it will do, Elsie. I can no longer bear excitement; and you know it is such an old antipathy, it is not at all easy. I understand that I ought to do it for your sake, but—"

"Papa! for Heaven's sake, not on my account!" begged the girl, pale to the lips. "Who said that?"

"Your aunt, child, and she is right; yes, she is right!"

Elsie sprung up from her chair and tried to speak.

"Don't be vexed, Elsie, that I have made the discovery. I am so happy about it. 'You see, child, it is a terrible thought for a father to know he must leave his child alone in the world all—alone.'"

"Dear, dear papa!" The pale face was turned toward him. "I am not afraid, of course not, and am living, and will live for a long time, and I can stay with you, papa! I came here to beg for that!"

"Don't upset me, Elsie! All these things have weakened me; and Siethmann is so disagreeable and so noisy, I—"

He groaned aloud, and put his hand on his chest.

"This stupid pain—it is surely good—that everything—happens as it does—for you, Elsie! You can't imagine how lonely and cold and dreary this life can be, or you would not be so courageous; for you, now, the world is full of roses."

She was silent. She felt benumbed. She only realized that now she had no one who understood her.

At this moment Siethmann rushed in in the greatest excitement.

Madame from the Burg, and the Bennewitzer were coming up the stairs!

Well, then! The old man suddenly changed color.

“Go into the other room, Elsie, you don’t need to see them, now—”

She went through the small arras-door into her mother’s room, and suddenly found herself face to face with Frau von Ratenow.

“We have come here, Elsie—the walls have ears at home now—Lili is everywhere, and it is not necessary for her to know everything that happens. I don’t know how that will-o’-the-wisp manages to bustle about Hegebach the way she does; but, after all, it is the fashion nowadays to court the men.”

She sat down in the chair by the window, in her heavy black silk cloak, but loosened her bonnet strings.

“Mercy on us! I believe Siethmann has lighted the fire!” she added.

The air was indeed stifling, and the pale girl felt as if she were suffocating.

The sound of the Bennewitzer’s sonorous voice came from the next room; it was so conciliatory, so mild, and the old lady tapped composedly on the window-sill with her large, well-cared-for hand; an expression of perfect contentment was upon her face.

“Look, Elsie,” she said, “nineteen years ago you lay on that self-same sofa, crying pitifully. Indeed, if I could have known all beforehand, I should not have taken you in my arms with such a heavy heart.”

“What do you mean, aunt?”

“Ah! my girl, it is wonderful in this world; the dear Lord leads one through such winding paths that everything is straight and equal in the end. What do I mean? Oh, go along, Elsie; you are not a girl of the ordinary

kind, who affects ignorance to the last. I know that that question is an unnecessary one, because you can answer it perfectly to yourself in your own heart; and if you do this, with your clear common sense, then you must say, 'Thank God, that it has come to this! My old aunt Ratenow was very good to me, it is true; but still it is another thing to be one's own master. I was always obliged to accommodate and submit myself to all kinds of caprices—a make-shift—and besides that, now my old father can have a few happy years, free from care!' Isn't it so, little girl?"

"Oh, auntie, I beg of you!" groaned the girl.

"And see, child, he is so good, so kind, he is truly a splendid man. I will confess to you, Elsie, when I heard—you were in boarding-school then—that he had lost his sons, then I thought, he will probably marry again, and I felt it would be providential if you should please him. I have seen it coming, little by little, with the greatest joy—and—well, he is in there, Elsie, and is asking your father's consent. Come here, dear old girl—close up to me; do you think I did not notice your flirtation with the handsome young lieutenant? Ah! Elsie, then I never could have been young myself! Lieutenants, child, are all very fine for you girls to dance with; but when it comes to marriage there is more to be thought of than a pair of flashing eyes and bright epaulets! Elsie! how can any one look so rigid! Elsie! but Elsie!" The girl had sunk upon her knees and lifted her clasped hands.

"Aunt, aunt, have mercy!" she sobbed, with tearless eyes, I will do anything, I will—I can not!"

"Good heavens!" She put her arms around the girl and lifted her up. "Elsie! act like a woman! This depends upon more than a girlish caprice; beware of yourself. 'I can not' my child—there are hard, serious things in this world which one ought not to look at through colored glass; you will assure yourself of prosperity for a long, long life. It can not be a leap into a bed of roses; but it must

be a serious step, made with an honorable purpose, an honest heart. My child, it might have happened so to me if I had not had such a sensible father. Do you suppose I would have chosen Friedrich von Ratenow? No, Elsie! I was over head and ears in love with a poor wretch of a fellow who was my brother's tutor. I was a saucy thing and told my father of it, when Herr von Ratenow asked for me. Gracious, child, you ought to have seen that! Before I had time to look around the tutor was out of the house and I had Ratenow's ring on my finger. I have never regretted it—and what do you want? Every princess must do the same thing—no, no, Elsie, you are too sensible!”

She stroked the golden head that lay so quietly on her breast. “You are going to be reasonable, aren't you?”

“Not yet, aunt! Wait a little, I implore you!” begged the trembling girl. “I must be more quiet, first—you must grant me that!”

She uttered the last words vehemently, and the old lady saw that she could urge her no further.

“I advise you to take a walk, child; there is plenty of time before dinner.”

She got up and handed the girl's hat and cloak to her. “There, girlie, good-bye.”

She went. She fairly ran. Here, at least, there was fresh air, and the broad open country lay before her and she still carried hope in her heart; she still felt strong enough to defend herself against the whole world. She thought of the quiet little village in Thuringia, of the simple church and of the people there who lived together in such peace: she saw Sister Beate's good face so plainly before her, under its little Herrnhuter cap—there was still one spot untouched by the storms of life.

Before she was aware of it she found herself at home—and she was glad when the servant told her that Madame and Fräulein Lili were both out. She started to go upstairs, then turned around abruptly.

"Where is the 'Herr Baron'?"

"In the library, fräulein."

She came down again and knocked at the door.

"Come in," was the response.

"May I go in, Moritz?"

"Why, Elsie, I pray you—of course."

"I would like to ask you something, Moritz."

"All right, Elsie; but come, let us go into the garden."

She looked at him with astonishment, he was so unlike himself—as if he were embarrassed.

"As you like, Moritz."

They went through the conservatory and strolled up and down in the sunny paths. The air was sweet with the perfume of the violets and the starlings chirped and twittered over their heads, in clear long drawn-out notes; the old Burg garden was indeed one of the delightful spots of the world.

All at once she covered her eyes with her simple little fan.

"Moritz," she began, "have I offended you in any way?"

"No, my dear child," he replied, gently.

"I thought I had; you have been so different with me lately."

He looked at her as she walked by his side with down-cast eyes. What had happened to the bright charming girl?

"Moritz," it was the old, child-like tone. "Must I do what they all expect? Must I?"

"Must! No, Elsie; but perhaps it would be well if you wished to do it."

"I can not, Moritz!"

He stopped and took her hand. "Elsie," he said in his simple-hearted way, don't think of Bernardi any more, don't wait for him; a thing like that must be forgotten. You must not imagine that he grieves as you do, little one. You don't know life yet!"

She glanced at him again with her mournful eyes, while a blush mounted to her face.

“I often think of him, Moritz; that happens without my will; but from the first moment I have never had any hope; I know so well that a gulf lies between us, a deep, deep gulf. I only mean, if I—but you don’t understand me at all, Moritz. I do not love my cousin a particle, not an atom as—one ought to love—one’s—”

She faltered, broke down, and stood before him, glowing scarlet, and with big tears running slowly down her cheeks.

Of course he understood her, but did he dare let her know it? What was to become of her if she should refuse the Bennewitzer! His mother would be furiously angry with her, and Frieda? Really, his domestic happiness depended upon the thing—it sounded absurd, but his little wife was positively jealous and she showed it at every opportunity. It was true that Elsie, in her innocence, had never suspected it and she should not know it either. He was still silent.

“Elsie,” he said finally, and he felt how commonplace the words sounded, “don’t make your life too hard; see”—and he began to wander up and down, his hands behind his back, “one grows older and quieter, and in later years one thinks so differently of affairs of the heart and marriages for love—and—ay—what was I going to say—Elschen, I would consider it again.”

She did not reply, but she dried her eyes.

“Very well, Moritz, but I beg one favor, at least; entreat your mother that to-day—only to-day—she requires no decision from me. And now, Moritz, forgive me for having troubled you.” She turned about and went back into the house, choosing the way through the hall, for she had heard Frieda’s voice in the conservatory and the sound of a waltz had fallen upon her ear. Lili played very well,

but she rarely did anything more than finish a few bars and then begin on something else.

Elsie sat down by the window in her own room. Now she had no one left her: now she was all alone. They were all angry with her because she disdained an assured future, a comfortable existence, the envied position of a rich young wife, and all for a reason which was so ridiculous to the world, but so serious and sacred to a pure woman. But her father, her lonely old father! said an inward voice, the only one which rose up in opposition to her thoughts: then a hot blush overspread her white face. "No," she said, under her breath, "I do not love him, I only deceive him and myself." She did not know the outside world with the thorny paths which a lonely girl is obliged to tread, but it could not be so horrible as if she— She sprung up once more, shivering with nervousness; hastily seizing a book she turned over the leaves until her eyes were attracted by a poem.

"Die Mutter sprach: Lieb Else mein,
Du musst nicht lange wählen!
Man lebt sich in einander ein,
Auch ohne Liebesquälen;
So Manche nahm schon ihren Mann,
Dass sie nicht sitzen bliebe,
Und fühlte sich im Himmel dann;
Und alles ohne Liebe."

She smiled sadly and closed the book; she bowed her head on her clasped hands and for the first time in many years wept like a child, a poor forsaken child.

So the hours passed away; out of doors the spring twilight fell over the budding trees, then the new moon shed her faint light into the young girl's room, but she did not stir. The sound of music came from the drawing-room. Lili was playing on the piano in order to while away the time. The others were staying so everlastingly long in Frau von Ratenow's room, and the old lady had sent word,

in her most polite way, that Fräulein Lili was not to come. It had been insupportably dull to-day—especially the dinner with the Bennewitzer for he had hardly spoken a word and had only continually made the one motion of his hand over his beard; and before that the family scene at the Cramms'—Annie as a happy *fiancée*, stiff as a puppet, and by her side Lieutenant von Rost, who looked so dreadfully indifferent and as if the whole affair were nothing to him. Mamma Cramm was the only one who seemed much affected, for the father's emotion seemed to spring from the silver-necked bottle in the ice-tub rather than from any rapture about his son-in-law. As soon as the first surprise was over, Lili had withdrawn from the family circle, of course with the permission to announce the happy engagement. Outside in the ante-room she had asked in true military fashion, "Annie, when did that bomb burst? How long has the thing been going on anyway? No one ever thought of it until now."

Annie had blushed, "Ah, it is an old fancy, but papa would never listen to a word on the subject."

"How cruel!" Lili had been obliged to suppress her wild desire to laugh. "Now however?"

"Ah! Lili, I should have died without him."

"Gracious!" the rogue had exclaimed in amazement.

"Well, then, I'll not disturb you any longer. Tell me, Annie, his name is *von Rost*, isn't it?"

"Yes, *von Rost*." The answer was somewhat snappishly given.

"Good-bye, Annie." With difficulty she had kept from laughing and had run home, eager to tell the great news at dinner, and after all there had only been gloomy faces around the table and no one, with the single exception of Frieda, had shown any interest in the thing.

* * * * *

The Bennewitzer had left immediately after dinner; the sisters had gone to the window to see the handsome trap

and Lili had yawned repeatedly, then had hummed a few bars from "Wildschütz."

"Doch ich nehm' mir einen Alten,
Sehe nicht die vielen Falten,"

and had finished with: "Beer, Frieda! I think I shall soon start for home."

"Well! I can not blame you if you do!"

The young wife was in an ill-humor and had buried herself in one of Heyse's novels. Moritz had gone to his mother's room, and finally Frieda had followed him. "Listen, Lili," she had said, "something is wrong again over there, and I am going to see about it."

Now, she had been gone for "ages," and Lili found the time hanging heavily upon her hands; even pale little Elsie had not been in to take pity upon her.

It was certainly time for her to go home again: if there were nothing else to do, she could at least amuse herself with the young nobleman from the court who was there with a shooting party; he was surely less tiresome than the Bennewitzer; anyway, what sort of heroes were these two, the Bennewitzer—and Moritz, the good big bear—and Frieda was even jealous of him. Merciful Heaven!

Meanwhile across the hall the young wife had listened for a little, then had gone into the room.

Frau von Ratenow was sitting as calmly as usual in the bow-window holding her knitting in her hands; by her side was her favorite cup with her crest upon it, as she had it every day.

Moritz, looking very much excited, was walking up and down the room with long strides.

"Ah!" cried his pretty little wife, "Moritz is playing the wild animal—what has happened then?"

"I don't agree perfectly with mother, Frieda."

"Well!" said the young woman ironically, "that is something rare, certainly!"

“And I maintain,” declared Frau von Ratenow, “it must not be lightly permitted; there are plenty of people who struggle against happiness just as a sick child does against medicine.”

“And I insist, mother, that among us it is not the custom to buy a wife!” he replied, his honest face red with anger and scorn. “She should be perfectly free, and have the privilege of giving herself away or of refusing the man. Where do you find either morality or womanliness in the horrible opinions which are, alas! the order of the day. For my part, I despise the girl who marries simply for money.”

He stopped before his mother, with flashing eyes.

The old lady remained perfectly calm. Moritz had always been the least bit visionary; he got that from his father, and, besides, the “boy” had not the slightest suspicion of the misery life held for a poor, unprotected girl.

“I certainly can not drag her to the church, and Hegebach is not the man to beg for a wife,” was her reply. “What you say, my boy, sounds very fine, if one had the needful remedy. No one knows better than yourself that theory and practice are totally different things. I have already discussed the subject too often; I shall say no more about it. My intentions were good. My grandmother used to say: ‘Love! love is for the most part imagination!’ I have known enough girls who were ready to drown themselves because they could not have their first choice, only to find out later that the second was the first real, true love, after all. But, Moritz, it is absurd in you; such sentiments are only allowable from either a love-sick school-girl or a half-cracked old maid.”

“It may be true,” he replied, curtly; “but I do not choose to believe it.”

He had stopped before Frieda, and was looking down at her with brightening eyes.

“Frieda, you say a word for the honor of your sex!”

“I don’t in the least understand what you mean;” and the little woman turned her head on one side, as if perplexed.

“Hegebach has offered himself to Elsie to-day, and she—”

“To Elsie?”

The astonished eyes flow from her husband to the mother-in-law, who was so calmly knitting.

“Well, then!” and she burst out laughing.

He started involuntarily. What was the meaning of this convulsive laughter that was really half-weeping? Big tears were indeed running down the pale cheeks.

“You have certainly dissuaded her from it, Moritz?”

“Dissuaded? No, Frieda; on the contrary, I have endeavored to explain the necessity of the step to her; but I was sorry for it afterward.”

“Indeed!” The young wife laughed no more. “I could not imagine how it would seem at the Burg without Elsie von Hegebach; it would be indescribable, surely!”

“What do you mean by that?” interfered the voice of the old lady.

“Oh, nothing, mamma. Moritz understood me very well.”

“I regret to say I did not, Frieda,” he replied, quietly.

“But I did.” Frau von Ratenow had arisen, and now stood before her daughter-in-law. “I have made a great deal of allowance for you, my child, for your moods and caprices, with which you have tyrannized over the whole house; have always excused you, because I had supposed you were devotedly attached to your husband; that he allowed himself to be tormented by you was his affair—he wished for nothing better. But,” she continued, raising her voice perceptibly, “if you should dare to accuse him of disloyalty—if you dare to attack the honor of the girl who has grown up under my roof—Frieda—Heavens! I

forget that you are my son's wife—the mother of his children!"

"Stop, mother!" said Moritz, quietly, drawing down the old lady's lifted, threatening hand. "Frieda does not understand what she said; she meant it otherwise."

"No," she cried, springing up; "I do not mean it otherwise; I know what I have said. Since Elsie von Hegebach has been in the house, he has become a changed man—has only eyes and attention for her; I certainly ought to know it better than you and the rest."

"Silence!" commanded the old lady, so calmly and solemnly that the beautiful mouth was involuntarily speechless. "What did I say to you long ago, Moritz," turning to her son, "as you were wooing your wife? 'Be untiring in your efforts to control her, so that she may not get beyond you.' You are now reaping the harvest of your boundless indulgence, and of your trifling; there are wives and children to whom goodness is like poison; and this was a love marriage! Mine was not; but I *esteemed* your father, and would not have ventured to insult him. The only thing lacking now is for you to beg for her forgiveness, my son, and then one chapter is ready for a modern romance of married life."

"You understand perfectly well, mother, that I shall not do that," he responded, gloomily.

But the old lady only half heard him; she had gone into her bedroom, and had bolted the door behind her.

"Frieda," he said, sadly, turning to her, "you have allowed yourself to be drawn into a fearful error. God knows you could not have hurt me more!"

She still stood there, tugging at her pocket-handkerchief, her blue eyes glittering through her tears.

"Frieda, do go down and calm yourself first," he entreated; "and then let us talk this over quietly. Heaven! how could you have thought such a thing?"

He was very pale, and she was forced to see that she had

wounded the great, true-hearted man deeply; but she would not see it.

She shook off his hand, and hastily left the room; she was so frightfully injured; she was such an unhappy woman—oh—

“Lili,” she sobbed, in her boudoir, and falling upon her sister’s neck, “it is awful, besides all one’s other troubles, to have such a mother-in-law. As big and old as Moritz is, he is still tied to her apron-strings like a little child, and never once takes my part when she treats me like a school-girl; but then why should he? He does not love me any more.”

The dreadful day had come to an end, and a wretched evening now followed; Frieda had shut herself up in her own room, and would not see Moritz. Lili told him this, glancing at her brother-in-law as timorously as one would look upon a criminal of the deepest dye.

The children had been screaming in their nursery, and when he had tried to quiet them they had been frightened at his frown. After that he had taken refuge out-of-doors; it was suffocating in the house, in his opinion; finally, he walked out of the court, down the avenue in the sweet spring evening, and without any particular aim sauntered through the Stadt-thor.

It was still pretty lively in the streets of the little town, with children playing before the house doors and the neighbors gossiping with one another in the moonlight, which was almost glaring in its brilliancy.

“Halloo, Ratenow!” called a voice, and some one struck him on the shoulder. “What are you doing here? If you are looking for your friends, come to the Casino; Rost has brewed a bowl of punch in honor of his engagement.”

Captain von P—— stood before him. Moritz was not in the mood; he did not feel like going, excused himself on

the plea of not being in evening dress, and finally went along.

As they entered the officers' handsome mess-room, they found it already very gay; the happy *fiancé* appearing the most temperate among them all, with, perhaps, the exception of the Bennewitzer, who was indifferently smoking a cigar.

"What!" said Moritz, with difficulty forcing himself to jest, "you here, Herr von Hegebach? How comes Saul among the prophets?"

"They caught me, as they probably did you, my dear Ratenow," he responded, drawing up a chair for Moritz. "I do not feel like going home yet. You know there are days in one's life when there does not seem to be any spot where peace is to be found."

Moritz was silent; he well knew what that meant, for he himself had requested him this morning to have patience until the morrow.

Elsie was so taken by surprise; his wooing had come upon her so suddenly, and other things which one is accustomed to say when a compulsory respite must be gained.

They had already turned from the punch to sack; Rost appeared unusually liberal to-night; he certainly had a very fine father-in-law, for he had already intimated to him that he was willing to help him arrange matters, even before the wedding; so a few bottles of sack more or less did not matter at all.

"Have you sent the news to Bernardi, Rost?" called out the stout assessor, Dolling.

"Of course," was the reply. "I only hope he will send his congratulations by telegraph, for his letters are becoming insupportable; how he ever managed to get into such a doleful state is beyond belief."

"His letters, however, are to be preferred to himself," exclaimed one of the young men; "he actually does nothing at all now but work or play the violin. When I was

away a little while ago, I tried several times to bring him out a little; otherwise, what is the good of being in a half-way decent city? But Heaven forbid!" he said, loftily; "that our performances disquieted him, and that the Tivoli Theater was a horror to him under any circumstances."

The most of the men laughed.

"I did not trouble him any more," the young officer concluded, filling his glass. "We of the cavalry are never disturbed by such trifles."

"I think it is positively certain that he will leave the service," another one remarked, slowly; "that is to say, (I discovered it only accidentally), he had asked my uncle, who is mad on the subject of music, if he thought he had enough talent to become a professional musician, a violinist."

"And upon that," the assessor interrupted, imitating the manner of the speaker, "it is to be hoped the uncle replied, 'Dear Bernardi, you don't scrape the "Wimmerholz" badly; but nowadays more than that is required to become a celebrated violinist.'"

Lieutenant von Rost, who was not easily moved, suddenly changed color.

"Such a man!" he said, in a low tone, to his neighbor on the left, "with the greatest trouble and difficulty, he has just been preserved from one folly, and now he wants to venture upon a greater. He is simply crazy!"

But his angry observation was drowned by the boisterous "Hoch" with which the comrades drank the health of the young *fiancée*.

"Fräulein Annie Cramm, hoch!" sounded from many voices.

"And a hoch! for all lovely women!" cried Captain von P——, and the glasses again clinked together.

Moritz rose abruptly. In his present mood it was no longer possible for him to remain here in this tumult,

“You are going?” the Bennewitzer asked. “Then I will come with you, if you will permit me.”

“Are you stopping in the hotel?” asked Moritz, when they had reached the lower hall where they still heard the animated sounds from the mess-room.

“Yes; but I will walk a little way with you, Ratenow.”

It was now perfectly quiet in the streets; only the moonlight lay over the town. A thin, filmy mist hung like a silvery veil over the roofs, and cast fairy-like fetters around the outlines of the houses and trees.

The two men walked on together in silence, neither one knowing just how to begin the conversation.

“My dear Ratenow,” said the elder, finally, “I should not like to have you judge me falsely—you, above all. A little while ago you looked at me so strangely. You must know that I am neither vain enough to believe that such a young girl as Elsie von Hegebach will fall into my outstretched arms with rapture; nor am I at an age when one is restless and tormented by the expectation of the decisive answer from a pair of red lips, and where one is wont to meditate upon self-destruction in case of refusal. I have already had to bear too many sad and heavy blows from fate for that. The motives which led me to woo my cousin were only of a half-way selfish nature. I was, to tell the truth, impelled to share our uncle’s inheritance with my cousin and his child, and this was the only possible means by which that purpose could be accomplished. But”—he stood still, and laid his hand on his companion’s shoulder—“I add to that, that I should not have conceived this plan if the young girl had not been in the highest degree congenial to me; I say ‘congenial,’ dear Ratenow; at my age, one no longer thinks of passionate love.”

They walked on again, but Moritz had remained dumb; he knew so well that the man spoke the exact truth; he knew that he might choose among many; he was a distin-

guished man with a large, noble heart, and he was still able to demand happiness, and yet—

“During the last few weeks I have continually painted to myself how it would be,” the Bennewitzer continued, with animation in his voice; “I have seen Elsie’s figure roaming through my lonely house, and have heard her voice ringing with happiness. I have been up to the rooms which I have fixed upon for her father, and I have planned out a journey in order to show the world on the other side of the Alps to the child’s wondering eyes. Heaven knows, Ratenow, it would be an unspeakable joy to me to make known to this young soul the thousand beauties with which nature and the hand of man have enriched the world, and—”

He hesitated.

“Once I traveled through the Black Forest, and into Switzerland, with my eldest son, and I shall never forget the pleasure which was given me by the unaffected delight, the naïve wonder, of the young mind; I would like to see it once more. Ratenow,” he asked, abruptly, “isn’t some one coming there?”

They stood at the entrance of the avenue; the dark tree-trunks rose up, sharply defined in the moonlight, and through the light mist they saw distinctly that a figure was moving quickly, half-running, toward them.

“It is a woman,” said Moritz. “It is Elsie!” he added, half a minute later. “Elsie, in Heaven’s name, where are you going? What is the matter?”

She suddenly hung upon him, and he felt the trembling and shaking of her whole body.

“Moritz, father! Take me to father!”

“What has happened, Elsie? Tell me!”

He unclasped her arms from his neck, and glanced at her deadly pale face.

“Sick,” she said, with quivering lips. “Siethmann

came; she wanted to fetch me, but I ran on ahead. Take me, Moritz!”

He drew her trembling arm into his own.

“Come, little girl.”

“I will go, too,” said the Bennewitzer. “Has a physician been called? Don’t you know, Elsie?”

She shook her head, and ran on so fast that the men had difficulty in keeping up with her. She wore neither hat nor cloak, and in the uncertain light there seemed something almost uncanny in the way she was flying.

She was already at the top of the stairs when the gentlemen entered the door; the doctor came toward them along the dusky hall.

“Come in, gentlemen?” he requested, softly. “I sent for the daughter; he can not live to see the morning.”

They stood in the small comfortless room next to the one occupied by the old man, the moonbeams fell through the window, and fell in broad white streaks upon the floor, only broken by the trembling shadows of the fresh green twigs which rustled before the windows.

“Tick, tack, tick, tack,” said the old Dutch clock, and through the half-opened door of the adjoining room came the sound of a distressing groan.

“Papa!” cried a voice, “don’t go away from me, don’t leave me alone, so frightfully alone!”

The physician took one quick step toward the door, then stopped again. The dying man was speaking slowly, hesitatingly, so brokenly as to be almost unintelligible.

“No, no, papa; don’t die, don’t die! I must say something to you, dear papa! Listen; can you still hear me?”

The physician went into the bedroom.

After a moment he came back again and beckoned to the Bennewitzer; he softly stepped in, seeking the girl with his eyes. She was kneeling before the arm-chair in which her father was resting, clinging to him; the old

man's right hand lay upon her head and his dying eyes were turned toward the man who was entering the room.

"It has come suddenly, cousin, but I am much—happier than before, because—Elsie, your hand! I've done nothing for you in life, poor child, forgive me. You were always good and dutiful. Forgive me, Elsie. Make dying—easy for me—for life was—so hard."

She raised her head and looked around as if imploring for mercy; but the tired eyes no longer met hers, and did not understand what she meant. She only felt how painfully his hand groped for hers and, when he had laid hold of it, made the feeble effort to lift it, and draw it across him in order to lay it in another hand. The mighty, awful majesty of death overpowered her at the aspect of the fearfully altered features; without any will of her own she yielded to the influence, then felt how a warm hand clasped hers, and how the dying hand quietly rested upon them both.

"Wilhelm, dear Wilhelm," said a manly voice, full of emotion, "I will care for her and protect her—I promise you!"

"Elsie!" whispered the dying man, "you are not left alone! No—poor—forsaken girl—no, Elsie—"

She lay there as if powerless, her head on his knee, her hand still in that of the Bennewitzer; it seemed as if a blood-red mist were floating before her eyes, and as if she could no longer think clearly. Then she heard Moritz's voice once more: "It is all over. Come, Elsie, my dear little girl!" and she was conscious of being lifted up, and then of nothing more.

When she came to herself, Frau von Ratenow was sitting upon the sofa upon which they had laid her; the old lady, dressed in a morning-gown and cap, had leaned her head against the back of the chair and was asleep. The rays of the rising sun were shining, fiery red, through the windows, filling the little room with his splendor.

CHAPTER XI.

THE young girl jumped up suddenly; the scenes of the night had appeared to her as if by magic. Ah! how terrible it is when the sad present has been driven away by a few hours' sleep, and when the awakening brings the burden of sorrow upon the soul once more with twofold weight, terrifying it anew and hurling it again into the depths!

She drew her hand over her forehead. Was it true then? And, as if to convince herself, she arose and stole gently past the slumbering Frau von Ratenow into the next room. A strong draught blew against her, and over that which was lying on the bed some one had spread a white pall.

She stood motionless; a frightful chill crept into her heart, and involuntarily she clasped her hands together. "Our Father, who art in Heaven," sounded in her troubled soul; she felt she must pray, and still she had not the power to express her petitions, her agony, in her own words—"and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us!"

Then horribly piercing tones floated through the room, for down below in the street the trumpeter was sounding the reveille, as he did every morning.

"The soldiers must waken, papa," Aunt Lotte had once explained to the little girl when the lively bugle notes had resounded as far as the Burg.

"Come, Elsie, my dear little girl, that will never rouse him again!" said Frau von Ratenow, drawing the girl to her. "It is well with him, my child; he is at rest."

The funeral was over, and the men who had walked to

the church-yard were now turning back, leaving Moritz and the Bennewitzer at the gate.

Lieutenant von Rost sauntered across the road to speak with his *fiancée* and her mother, who were walking on the other side; perhaps not entirely for the purpose of getting a breath of fresh air, but also with the idea of catching a glimpse of the funeral procession. Frau Cramm loved that sort of thing, and Annie no less; a large fire, a wedding or a funeral were sure to draw her near to the scene of action.

The lieutenant saluted them and walked by Annie without offering her his arm; he was not particularly gallant, and from the beginning he had not accustomed his *fiancée* to such attentions, a fact which Annie felt deeply and grievously; it would have been so nice, so truly and touchingly intimate to move slowly through the streets so that the people might observe how devoted they were.

“My dear son,” Frau Cramm commenced, “didn’t you hear how Fräulein von Hegebach was? She must be fairly petrified by grief, from what Annie says.”

The young lady nodded eagerly.

“Yes. Imagine, Leo, I was there a little while ago. She never spoke, and she looked so wretched; she was only upon indifferent terms with the old man, and *au fond* has no reason for such despair. But she seems to be utterly crushed; can you understand it?”

He dropped his eyeglass. “It might be possible,” was his reply; “two such startling events at one and the same time.”

“Two?” mother and daughter cried, as if with one mouth.

He was silent a moment, and then said: “She became engaged to the Bennewitzer by her father’s death-bed.”

A twofold exclamation of astonishment fell upon his ear.

"That girl is lucky!" said the round elderly lady in the black velvet mantle.

"It is amazing, isn't it?" asked Lieutenant von Rost, with an expression which always left one in doubt whether he meant it seriously or ironically.

"A great good fortune," Frau Cramm repeated. "And that magnificent Bennewitz and the sumptuous carriage! Last year even Prince H—— came there for the shooting."

Annie did not speak. She was thinking of the boarding-school and how Elsie had sat over her books till she was utterly worn out, in order to pass the examinations, and how plainly she had always dressed. Yes, indeed, it was wonderful good fortune! Whoever would have thought it!

The news of the engagement of the orphaned girl to her cousin flew through the little town on the wings of the wind. She herself sat in her own room, in her long trailing mourning dress; her white face, with its infinitely woe-ful expression around the corners of the mouth, looked fairly ghostly above the black crêpe. She had said very little since that morning, but Aunt Ratenow all the more. She had not wept either; but she had wandered about from one place to another with a troubled expression, her hands idle and her eyes gazing sadly at the ground; hardly a morsel of food had passed her lips, and she had scarcely closed her eyes in sleep. She continually saw the colorless face of her dying father before her, and felt the laborious groping after her hand, and how the fetters had been cast around her, the hideous, invisible fetters which she must wear all her life long. It was more than cruel to make use of the inviolable power of the hour of death, the strong might of a last wish, to make a human heart miserable for all time!

"Father, you did not love me!" she groaned aloud; and then she saw again the happy smile as he had joined

their hands, the last, oh, such an easy breath, as if the poor breast had been freed from a heavy burden; he died contented, he died calmly—and she must live—must live! It was horrible! She had not seen the man again in whose hand her father had laid hers, and Frau von Ratenow had urged her no further; this intense silent grief did not accord very well with bridal happiness. But now that the funeral was over, the *fiancée* had a longing to speak with the girl who had been intrusted to him in that solemn hour.

Frau von Ratenow, likewise in deep mourning, mounted the stairs to announce this important visit to Elsie. In her hand she held a few cypress twigs which the Bennewitzer had taken from the casket before it was lowered into the ground—a last greeting for the daughter. The dignified woman knocked at the door less resolutely than usual, and then entered. Elsie was sitting by the table, and had writing paper and a pen before her; but she pushed the half written letter into her portfolio and arose. Frau von Ratenow pressed the cypress into the little hand, and stroked the white cheeks.

“Hegebach sends his regards; he thought you might feel like going to the grave with him; the carriage is waiting, Elsie. Will you get ready? He will come to fetch you.”

With the words “with him” she shrunk away and for an instant a rosy blush conquered the pallor of her face. She did not answer, only shook her golden head gently.

“Why have you drawn down all the window blinds?” the old lady questioned, “as if God’s sunlight were something to be afraid of.”

She drew the curtains apart, and the dazzling sunshine streamed into the room and touched the girl’s head as with a glory; she was obliged to close her eyes, the rays rushed in so mercilessly.

“Look out, Elsie!” Frau von Ratenow took her hand

and drew her to the window. "See how the buds are swelling on the apple-trees and how blue the sky is. We should honor the dead, child, but not forget the living, and you have duties in life; take courage, dear!"

The girl did not lift her eyes; if it were possible she had grown even a shade whiter.

"I am going down now, Elsie. I have a few words to say to Frieda. In the meantime I will send your *fiancée* upstairs. At such a time etiquette may be set aside, and besides he is not a youth. When you return from the cemetery come to my room for a cup of coffee. Good-bye, Elsie."

She was gone. The young girl struck her forehead with her little hand, and clutched her soft hair as if she were in intense pain. Wasn't there any escape? Her terrified eyes glanced through the room. Must she redeem a promise which was so opposed to every feeling of her heart? Oh! to be free, only to be free once more! It was horrible to know that every such thought was a sin. She took up her dainty black mantle mechanically, and put on her bonnet; but her hands fell as she was fastening her veil, for there on the threshold—"Cousin!" she stammered.

He had come up to her and had taken both of her hands in his, then he drew them to his lips.

"My beloved Elsie," he said, gently; "it was a sad hour, but at the same time a serious and sacred one, in which the assurance of a happy future was given to us."

He spoke warmly, nevertheless what he said sounded stiff, almost pedantic. A load seemed to roll from the girl's breast, but she was silent.

"Shall we go to your father's grave together, now, Elsie?"

She nodded. He took her parasol from the table, and handed it to her, then offered her his arm. She hardly laid more than the tip of her fingers upon it, and so they

left the room and went down the stairs and through the vestibule to the carriage. He helped her in, and carefully spread the costly robe over her knees, as she sat upon the soft, silvery silk cushions. She had not once lifted her eyes; but now as they drove rapidly away, she looked up. Frau von Ratenow was standing at the window, and waved her hand to her.

A feeling of unutterable wretchedness took possession of the girl as she rolled away in the luxurious carriage; it seemed to her as if she had been bought, as if she were unworthy of herself, and with a sudden movement she drew her crêpe veil over her face, as though she were ashamed to have the clear bright spring sunlight shine in her eyes.

She took no notice of the arm which was offered her at the entrance to the church-yard, but stepped rapidly ahead.

“Where are you going, Elsie?” he asked. “The grave is on this side.”

But she had already knelt down by another mound, and was wringing her hands as if in a prayer of desperation. If *she* were still living, then—a mother could never thrust her child into a loveless life, no, never!

He stood aside, quietly waiting. It was a long time before she arose, and turning followed him to the new-made grave upon which the clods of earth lay irregularly, a sad sight which they had tried to hide under countless wreaths. She stood here without a word, without a tear. He took her hand, but she gently drew it away from him.

“Shall we go back?” he asked, after a quarter of an hour of unbroken silence.

She assented, and again walked quickly on through the narrow paths between the rows of graves. She delayed at the carriage; she would greatly have preferred to walk. He assisted her in, and sat down by her side in silence. He knew what it meant to return home from a new-made grave; he understood her melancholy manner only too

well. She was somewhat shy and serious and sometimes almost bitter. The child's brown eyes must only learn to laugh again; they would do that when she was no longer obliged to look upon trouble and care, when the intoxicating fragrance of a careless, bright existence should float around her in the cheery rooms at Bennewitz and in the magnificent park. The smiles would come back again on the journey; he would take her to Paris the very first thing; after all, she was only a mortal maiden, and Paris—just Paris! that is a most fascinating word for a woman's ear. She had again enveloped her face in her veil, and looked neither to the right nor the left. Lieutenant von Rost and Captain von H. stood before the riding-ground as they drove by. They bowed low and gazed after the couple, and at the black veil which fluttered out of the carriage window for a moment.

“She has not yet learned how to lie back upon the cushions like a *grande dame*,” said Rost. “She sat as a child who has been scolded sits upon the school-bench. Well! it will not last long. Women are incredibly clever at such things.”

“Do you believe that there is any love on her side?” asked Von H.

“Pah!” exclaimed Rost, turning to his horse, which the groom led out at that moment.

CHAPTER XII.

IN the meantime Frau von Ratenow had really been with Frieda; the young woman's mood seemed incorrigible, and she had hardly had a word of sympathy for the orphan. Once Lili had gone upstairs with the intention of condoling with her very coolly, but her good fickle little heart had been conquered by the quiet, grief-stricken girl, and her eyes were red with weeping when she came back to Frieda.

“Good heavens, why do you pity her so?” the young wife has asked, angrily. “She has made her fortune by it! Don’t you begin like Moritz, who announces this engagement as if at the least the end of the world were approaching.”

“But, Frieda! no one looks like *that* in spite of all grief, if she is happy! No, Frieda, you are in a bad humor, and you want some one whom you can vex. I know you well, little sister. She stole a courtier away from you once, isn’t that it? You certainly can not be really jealous of Moritz; he never troubled himself about a soul in the world except just you.”

But neither bantering nor encouragement had succeeded in banishing the ill humor of the beautiful woman; everything had been upset since Elsie had come, and now there was no prospect of her leaving the house; they must show respect to her on account of her affliction; she was no longer a person who could be overlooked; she was the *fiancée* of a man who belonged among the leaders in those circles which are considered the first in the province.

Frieda had fastened a coral pin in her dark-blue dress, for she was not in mourning; what had she to do with the worn-out old man who had closed his tired eyes?

The old lady, however, had come to her with such an expression of satisfaction upon her whole face that the black crêpe seemed scarcely fitting. All that she had longed for with regard to Elsie had come to pass; the poor little girl had really and truly drawn the great prize—and how beautifully she carried herself, so seriously and so calmly, and still with such pride—and how lovely she looked in her deep black garments. Since her father’s death she had never once tried to appear coy and shy. Ah, indeed, such an expression in the eye which is closing forever has a solemn, holy power, and makes everything which one has up to that time fancied valuable, appear trifling and childish. Of course Elsie had willingly seized

the supporting hand which had been held out to her in the very moment when her little boat began to drift aimlessly upon the sea of life.

“Elsie is a good, sensible child, God bless her!” The old lady’s grief was not very deep. Really, she was sorry for one thing; she wished he might have had the happiness of living a few years in comfort; but God knew what was best; he and the Bennewitzer had never agreed very well, and it might have been that he would have disturbed the perfect harmony. And he had always been an invalid. Yes, yes, he was released. Might he rest in peace!

With a most cordial “Good-morning” she established herself in one of Frieda’s fragile easy-chairs, and inquired after the health of her little grandson with such a cheery voice that the younger woman’s blue eyes rested upon her in astonishment.

“Well, Frieda, dear,” she went on, easily, “what do you think of Elsie? I hope your foolish whims have evaporated by this time?” and she took the young woman’s hand. “Listen, my treasure; a heavy burden has been lifted from my soul, you can see that plainly, and when anything gives me pleasure, you know, I am always glad to have other people pleased as well. You may choose something especially fine for your birthday, Frieda; will you? Well, then, out with it—you help, Lili.” The young woman’s expression was not very agreeable yet, even though what she heard sounded extremely promising, for Mamma Ratenow was always generous in her gifts.

“You are very kind, mamma,” came hesitatingly from the full scarlet lips. “I—”

“Well! you have time enough to think it over; don’t be in a hurry. I had thought perhaps you would like to take a journey with Moritz, stay a little while in Baden-Baden, then go on to Switzerland and the Italian lakes. How would that do? I would look after the children. Now, take it into consideration, chicken. Good-bye. I

want to speak to Moritz; he is looking at the lambs. Good-bye, children!"

Indeed she was clever; she knew how to find the tune to which each one most willingly danced, and she also knew that the desired effect never failed to follow. It was so in this case. The two sisters immediately sat down on the lounge close beside each other, and turned over the leaves of the latest fashion journal; they found such a beautiful traveling costume. "If that were chosen in other colors, perhaps in *gens d'armes* blue?"

Moritz hated traveling; it was too uncomfortable to suit him, and more than that he feared the expense, for Frau Frieda did nothing cheaply. But now he could not help himself. Travel! Oh, delightful word! Baden-Baden! Moritz was the only one who remained stubborn.

"What is the matter with you, boy?" his mother asked; "how can you take Frieda's foolish, petty jealousy so much to heart? She is on the right road to become reasonable."

He struck his forehead half angrily. "Your suspicions are wrong, mother. I have simply ignored Frieda's mood, even if I can not help confessing that her conduct has hurt me. Moreover, it may be that she was the least bit in the right; perhaps I was too eager about the girl's fate."

They crossed the court together during this conversation; the golden spring sunshine lay upon the old Manor-house; the leaves of the tall lindens at the gate-way were emerald green and almost transparent; on the roofs of the barns the pigeons were sunning themselves in long rows, then suddenly they flew away, clapping their wings and looking like silvery sparks against the deep blue sky. A carriage rolled swiftly through the gates and stopped before the entrance.

"Elsie and the Bennewitzer, Moritz," said Frau von

Ratenow, advancing quickly. "Where are you going, Moritz?"

Her son had taken his hat from his blonde head, and was greeting them as he walked away toward the stables. "I must examine Sultana; the horse doctor is coming to-day to probe her foot again."

"Queer!" muttered the old lady, going on quickly. She overtook the couple at the door, and squeezed the little girlish hand in its black glove.

Elsie looked so unlike herself—so strangely stiff and resolute. It was her father; but this was so unnatural; if she had only wept at the least! She sat in the same way in her aunt's cozy room, where they went for coffee. The folding-doors were opened into the conservatory, and the free, warm, soft air of spring floated in, the sunlight lay full and hot on the flagstones of the terrace, and solitary rays hung in the air like sharply outlined bands, with millions of motes dancing in them. The girl turned her head away, and sat motionless, with burning eyes, without speaking a word, without taking the slightest interest in the conversation. What was it all to her? She seemed to herself like one who has been thrust forth from a blooming garden into wintry ice and snow; she stood in the midst of it, freezing, freezing; and from the other side the blossoming roses nodded and asked: "Why do you let them force you?" And the swallows flew past and twittered: "Has your courage come to this? Aren't you ashamed of yourself?" And she was ashamed; she was so overcome with it, with true maidenly shame, that she sprung up and rushed out upon the terrace, and with swift steps walked up and down the dear old paths in the garden.

"Frau von Ratenow," said the Bennewitzer, when Elsie had so abruptly left the room, "is my *fiancée* ill? I must acknowledge that this mute despair worries me. Can it be merely the shock of her father's sudden death which has worked such a change in her?"

The old lady shook her head unconcernedly.

“My dear Hegebach, the girls of to-day are different from those of our time; then life was brisk and energetic; now it is the fashion to be a little doleful. Besides, think, it is the day of the burial, and in spite of everything her attachment to the old man was almost absurdly tender.”

“Do you think so, madame?” he asked, slowly, and settled himself among the deep cushions of the arm-chair a little more comfortably than he had sat in the young girl’s presence.

“I do not know; only a little while ago she seemed to me like a child. It was perhaps the expression of the eyes which chiefly caused it. When I went upstairs to-day to fetch her I was met by such a glance. Indeed, you will chide me for being sentimental, madame, but I can not banish that look, there was something so questioning in it, so reproachful. Once before a pair of eyes gazed at me with such an expression, and I have never been able to forget it. It was in Russia; a young gypsy woman stood by the road-side begging; my coachman, a rough fellow, struck her on the head with his whip. Not even an eyelash quivered, but her big dark eyes were turned upon me, and there was a world of woe in their glance. As I approached Elsie to-day, she had just such questioning, reproachful eyes and the grieved mouth, and I—I can not help it—I must say it, there must be more in it than mourning for her dead father.”

“Hegebach!” in a tone of deep disapproval.

His words had given the stately woman a feeling of indescribable uneasiness. She shook her head and looked at her *vis-à-vis* searchingly, but she did not know what to say in reply. In her perplexity she took up the coffee-pot and filled her cup to the brim, then rose up and handed her guest a cigar, and at the same time asked: “Where can Elsie be? Shall we take a turn in the garden?”

They wandered about the paths, but Elsie was not to be

seen. Frieda and Lili came back from their drive with the children; they could see them over the wall, and they also saw Moritz ride away on horseback; he saluted them and called out that he was going to the farms.

“I can not imagine where Elsie is; she is a strange girl,” and “Elsie! Elsie!” rang through the garden, but there was no answer.

“I pray you, Frau von Ratenow, leave her alone; she is not in the mood for talking. I can feel for her.”

They walked on in silence. Here and there he stopped and looked at the budding shrubs and gave their botanical names, but the irritated woman at his side made no response.

“I must excuse myself early to-day.” The Bennewitzer had stopped and looked at his watch. “I beg you to give my loving regards to Elsie.”

“I will send some one to look for her, dear Hegebach.”

“No, I pray you. Perhaps she is weeping; don’t trouble yourself, madame. I shall come again to-morrow. One’s cheerfulness should never be forced.” He then commissioned the under-gardener, who was passing by, to order his carriage, went on smoking calmly, and asked about some widely different matters.

“Apropos, Hegebach!” the old lady interrupted. “What did you say was the name of the jeweler in Berlin of whom you had ordered the engagement-ring?”

“Haller & Company,” he replied. “It will not be done for a week.”

“Of course not,” she exclaimed, “because everything is heaped upon such establishments. Thomas, here, in the market-place would have made it exactly as well, and quicker, but in that you are like every one else, Hegebach!”

He smiled, but did not answer.

“I think the carriage has driven around,” he said.

“Permit me, then, to take leave; until to-morrow, madame, and my remembrance to my sad little Elsie.”

He kissed her hand, went up the terrace with a springing step, and vanished into the house; the next moment his carriage rolled swiftly across the paved court.

“Of course he was displeased,” said Frau von Rate-now, still standing at the foot of the veranda steps; the child’s behavior is really inexcusable. Heavens! what trials one has with young people. She ought to have been *my* father’s daughter!” She turned about and again paced up and down the garden paths, taking long steps, and looking very much irritated. Well, she would not say anything about it to-day, but to-morrow— It was extremely improper to run away like that, and it was dangerous too.

And by the way, what was all this from the Bennewitzer, this tale about the eyes? It was not at all necessary for him, at his age, to be gazing into the child’s eyes, as if he were a young ensign; this soft-heartedness and languishing were desperately unbecoming to him; he never was like that before! She brushed her hand across her forehead.

A few minutes after she appeared suddenly in the dairy, so like a dark apparition that the housekeeper nearly fell on her knees from fright; she had supposed madame anywhere except here; she had just been drinking coffee with the Fräulein and Herr von Hegebach.

“Well, you had better faint away entirely,” she said, with her loud voice. “It’s the fashion nowadays.” Then she went from one pan to the other and peered into all the butter tubs.

Madame was indeed very uncomfortable; she could not even knit, as usual; she continually saw the girl’s white face before her, and heard the Bennewitzer’s foolish talk about the eyes. There was nothing else to do. She must tell her, in all kindness, but tell her she must. She had

already risen, intending to go upstairs, when Moritz came in and seated himself in his father's chair, opposite her, and he had several matters which must be decided at once.

To his question, "Has Hegebach gone already?" she replied with a curt "As you see!" He then hastily began to talk of oats and other herbage for fodder. She could not tell him how the girl had acted.

"Where is Elsie?" he asked, in the midst of the conversation.

"Upstairs probably. But how did you happen to let the young horse-doctor attend to Sultana? I saw him coming away from the stables a little while ago."

"The county farrier is sick, and I would not let my favorite wait any longer."

"Oh ho!" she said, but her thoughts had already wandered to another, very different, subject.

Then the young ladies came in with the children; Lili was so gay and the little ones so full of fun that the dusky room was filled with laughter and merry shouts, and when the children at last said, "Good-night," it had grown late and the moonlight lay upon all the roofs of the manor.

"Will you dine with us?" asked Moritz; "and is Elsie coming down?"

"Thank you, no," she replied. "Sophie may serve our dinner here. Elsie will not feel like it yet, you know."

"Then good-night, mother."

The old lady rose quickly from her chair; she must talk with Elsie. She hastily mounted the stairs and unlatched the door into the girl's room; it was completely filled with dazzling white moonlight; the windows stood wide open and the sweet perfume of the violets had floated in with the moonbeams. It was perfectly still; nothing stirred.

"Elsie!" she said softly, and looked searchingly around the room. The girl was lying on the bed, and the old lady crossed the floor and leaned over her. Positively she

was asleep, and in her hand she was holding a little bunch of faded violets which she pressed against her breast. The old chest at the foot of the bed was open, and on the top, half drawn out, lay a rumpled white dress with rose-colored bows; she knew the dress, and she recognized the bunch of violets, and she saw the girl before her as she had seen her on that evening, with the blessed, happy, child-like eyes. She stood motionless; the old lady was in a strange mood, such as she had not known for a long, long time; was it caused by the perfume of the violets, and by the nightingale that was singing her long sweet song out of doors?

She stole silently out and down the hall, and then sat for a while in the darkness in her own room resting her head upon her hand.

“Nonsense!” she finally said, softly, and went to the little table where the matches lay, and “Nonsense!” she repeated aloud, and *risch!* a clear flame burst forth under her fingers. “To-morrow morning, however, I will speak to her; it must be done.”

CHAPTER XIII.

EARLY the next morning a fine rain was falling, and lowering clouds hid the rising sun, but the dampness had been a blessing to the budding trees, for everything had grown wonderfully green during the night. The servants in the wing were already stirring, and the grooms were feeding the horses, but a death-like stillness yet reigned in the manor-house; only a light step had come along the corridor and gone down the stairs; it had passed quickly through the lower hall, and into the kitchen, and through the servants' hall into the open air.

It was pretty cool and Elsie von Hegebach drew her veil

over her face, and walking straight across the court went out of the gate. The housekeeper, who was on the point of entering the dairy, looked after her, shaking her head.

"I do believe she is going to the church-yard," she said to the kitchen maid.

"She had a traveling-bag in her hand," the other one answered, and then they both went on into the cellar.

In the stable-door, however, stood a tall, fair-haired man looking after her with honest blue eyes and a serious face. He knew what she intended, and he did not stir his foot to hasten after her and stop her.

"But where will she go?" he asked himself, standing perfectly motionless, until the dark, willowy figure had disappeared at the end of the avenue. Then he once more turned his attention to the sick horse, patting his glossy neck when he looked at him with his intelligent eyes. Half an hour later, as he slowly crossed the court, he heard the shrill whistle of a locomotive from the other side of the town.

"A good journey to you, Elsie, my dear little girl," he said, softly. "Whether you have been clever or not, I can not say, but that you have done right, that I know."

It was nine o'clock when Frau von Ratenow sent the maid upstairs to request Fräulein von Hegebach to come to her. The old lady sat by the window as usual, and was looking very serious, even a trifle pale; she had had a bad night; troubled dreams with various evil presentiments had tormented her; the odious white dress and the bunch of violets and the girl's extraordinary behavior of the day before had played an important part among them. And by the sober light of day the old lady had been furiously angry with herself; she ought to have wakened the child last night, ought to have rebuked her. She was betrothed. Had she any right to think of another man? And after all, who was this other? A fellow like dozens of young men, distinguished by nothing except a little

talent for the violin. It must come to an end—in all kindness—but to an end.

“Fräulein Elsie is not in her room,” the maid reported.

“Then look in the garden,” was the order.

The servant stood still. “I don’t think the fräulein will be there, madame; the housekeeper says, ma’am, that Fräulein Elsie went to the church-yard before day-break this morning.”

“Nonsense!” The old lady rose. “When might that have been?”

“About four o’clock, madame, so the housekeeper says.”

“And now it is nine! Look in the garden!”

The maid departed.

Frau von Ratenow sat down again calmly, and looked out into the court. The servant was a very long time in coming back, but the old lady would not allow herself to be worried; where could Elsie be? She would soon appear.

“I can not find the fräulein,” was again the maid’s report. “Dorothy says besides, that she was carrying a traveling-bag in her hand.”

“Very well, she will soon be here.”

The servant left the room.

For awhile the old lady remained where she was, then went up the stairs and entered the missing girl’s room. Everything as usual. Nothing was gone except the little portfolio, the crucifix over the bed and her prayer-book, but she did not notice that yet. The chest was carefully closed, and as Frau von Ratenow lifted the lid she saw the folded white dress inside, folded with care.

“She will come back; Heaven knows what design she had this morning!”

Then she stepped again to the little table under the book-shelves; a letter lay upon it!

“A letter—sealed!” It was a new-fashioned flowing

handwriting, and the old lady was obliged to take her spectacles out of her pocket before she could read it.

“To Frau von Ratenow.”

She sat down and broke the seal, slowly, without any haste, but she had grown white to the lips.

“MY DEAR, DEAR AUNT,—Do not think me too ungrateful that I leave your house secretly, the home in which I have received untold kindness during my whole life. No choice is left me. I am defenseless among you all, and so weary. I have only just strength enough to go away. I can not live with a lie in my heart. I was not able to tell you the truth—to tell you myself. I wanted to do it yesterday when I stood by papa’s grave with Herr von Hegebach; but not one word crossed my lips. I am not sure that you understand me, aunt. I pray the dear Lord that you may do so, then you will judge me more charitably.

“I am turning my steps toward D——, and will write Herr von Hegebach from there. I know well that he is too honorable not to release me from a promise which was torn from me in a moment when my mind was palsied and I was half fainting from anxiety.

“Farewell, dear aunt. I am and shall always remain your truly grateful and respectful niece,

“ELSIE VON HEGEBACH.

“P.S.—I can at any time have the situation of assistant teacher in D——. Do not be anxious about my future.”

The letter dropped from the trembling hands.

“That—Heaven—how was it possible!”

She took up the note once more as if she had not read it aright; then she looked at her watch, and rising as if under the weight of a heavy burden, sought her own room. She rang, and with averted face gave her order to the maid.

“Request my son to come to me.”

"The baron had gone out on horseback," was the reply.

She went into her bedroom and gathered together a traveling sachel, a morning gown, and various things needful for a journey; but she always took up the wrong thing, and was not able to find what she wanted; then she hunted up a guide-book; the train *via* Halle would leave at eleven o'clock.

She rang again and ordered Johann go to Bennewitz with a note.

"Herr von Hegebach is in town. I saw his carriage early this morning," said the maid, timidly.

Was everything bewitched to-day?

"Very well!" she replied; but she was beginning to be very impatient. This was the thanks for all her love! She ran away like the heroine in a novel! The great un-hoped-for good fortune which had, as it were, fallen into her lap, had been thrust from her by the homeless girl. She was compromising herself and the house in which she had found a home. Where had the gentle child with the calm brown eyes found this fatal energy? But they must not yield to her. At any cost the letter to the Bennewitzer must be stopped.

She went to her writing-desk and scratched off a telegram to the principal of the boarding-school at D—, telling her to request Elsie not to write a line until she had conferred with her; she would arrive by the evening train, and begged for a lodging. She sent the servant out with the sealed message, and wrote to the Bennewitzer. He must be found somewhere in the hotel, at the Rathhaus or in the office of the county court; he must not be permitted to come here; something must be done to keep him away.

How hard it was for this honest woman to compose a falsehood. She tore up the third sheet of paper. She had at first thought of writing that Elsie had a sick headache; but, heavens! he would be sure to learn that she had gone

out. She had suddenly been obliged to undertake a short journey.

Pah! Where should she go? He would be sure to see that something was wrong. No, she could not lie, come what would; she saw no escape.

“If Moritz were only there!”

“A card from Herr von Hegebach.”

The maid brought a bouquet of lilies of the valley from Fräulein von Hegebach, and a note to Frau von Ratenow.

“Carry the flowers to Fräulein Elsie’s room,” she commanded, and then opened the envelope.

The Bennewitzer’s letter ran:

“My purpose of dining with you to-day, madame, is unfortunately interfered with. I must return to Bennewitz immediately, as the building committee of the M—schen Railway is at this moment surveying the tract which lies upon my estate. Excuse such haste. I hope to be able to spend a couple of hours with you and my *fiancée* to-morrow in your charming home.

“Very truly yours,

“HERMANN VON HEGEBACH.”

“Thank Heaven, a respite is won!”

Frau von Ratenow took heart once more. She could now start at eleven o’clock; she could also hope for the friendly counsel of Sister Beate, in D—. The girl should not be permitted to thrust happiness away from her like that. She hastily went on with her preparations. Gracious! what mustn’t one do for such a stubborn creature! And how she did hate railways; and in Halle she would be obliged to take another ticket. Ah! and it was such a horribly noisy place!

All at once another idea came into her head. She had heard the trampling of a horse, and had gone to the window. Positively it was he!

“Moritz,” she called with her loud, resounding voice.

He took off his hat and nodded.

“Directly, mother.”

Then he sauntered slowly toward the house; and she could hear him still talking to the gardener at the door. Finally he came in.

“Goodness, boy, how slow you are!” she said, impatiently.

“Were you in a hurry? I beg your pardon, mother.”

“It is a quarter past ten, Moritz; and—will you do me a favor? You know how I despise traveling. You go to D——, and you talk to Elsie. She has always been more easily influenced by you. You know nothing about it yet, Moritz? You don’t know that the child has run away? Or, I pray, Moritz, did you know of it?” she looked at him searchingly.

He was so calm in spite of her hasty words.

“Certainly, mother, I saw her go.”

“Moritz! and you did not try to stop her, did not try with all your might to hinder her from carrying out her foolish, sentimental idea?”

He stood there, so tall and so noble.

“No, mother!” He took his riding-whip up from the table and bent it to and fro in his hands as defiantly as he had done as a boy when anything had not gone to suit him; but at the same time his face was full of determination. “No, mother, I had no right to do it!”

“Good heavens, Moritz!”

The old lady had grown wrathful.

“No right,” he repeated, “you have none, and I have none, mother: according to our laws, no one, thank God, has the right to compel a girl to marry against her wishes.”

“It is enough to drive one crazy! What fine speeches you all make! What constrained her at the moment of decision, I should like to know?”

“Everything! People, circumstances, life and death,

mother; and her own heart cried 'No!' but nobody would listen to it!"

"But why, Moritz? Don't you comprehend the motive? Is it not madness in her position?"

"The motive? Indeed you must not ask that, mother; who has fathomed the mystery which draws one heart toward another or repels one from the other?"

"You speak like a poet, Moritz; look about you in the world; it is clear broad daylight; the life of man is prosaic, no idyl; it is a struggle and chase in which every one must look after himself!"

"And that which drives the wheels, mother, is love; the love which will not allow itself to be disowned in the world, though the Realists take so much trouble toward that end. Love and loyalty—they are so firmly fixed in our German blood, mother," and he bowed his head seriously, "I can not express it to you as I would; one needs finer words than are at my command."

"Love?" The old lady rose. "Love," she repeated; "you mean the little lieutenant? What is he in comparison with the Bennewitzer? A nothing, a nobody; he has courtly manners, and he can play a little on the violin: *voilà tout!*"

"I know him only as a charming man," continued Moritz; "but again, mother, that is a mystery also. Love does not inquire about outward things, about position or amiability. And yet—a nobody, mother? Confess, now, if, for instance, Bernardi were the Bennewitzer's son, how then?"

"Then it would be totally different, my boy; now stop your sentimental stuff and nonsense. Will you go?" she asked, imperatively. "Will you lay the case before Elsie once more? As for Bernardi, she can not marry him; he is sure to have consoled himself long ago."

"So far as the first is concerned, I concede that point; he probably can not marry her. If he has forgotten her

already, I do not know. I don't believe it, though, for early this morning Rost's groom brought a beautiful wreath for the grave, by Bernardi's order. As for going to Elsie, however, no, mother, I have just given you my opinion. I will not advise the child."

"Very well, then I shall go myself."

"Don't do it, mother dear, it is not right."

"Would you have her left to reproach me when she has become a nervous old woman?" she returned. "I shall do my duty—bah!"

"It is useless, mother, especially in your present state of excitement."

"Heaven helps the man who helps himself," she said.

"You are still a dreamer!"

And she went into her bedroom.

CHAPTER XIV.

It was the same road by which she had come and which she was now retracing in the dizzy rush of the express train.

Then it was autumn and foggy, and she had arrived in the evening with her heart full of blissful expectation; now it was a spring morning and the sun shone mercilessly on the cushions of the *coupé*, showing each rent and every shabby spot: the little gold-rimmed mirror opposite reflected a pale face with such a weary expression about the mouth, and that was herself, Elsie von Hegebach. She ~~leaned~~ ^{leaned} back against the cushions as if she were exhausted with her eyes fixed upon the flying landscape. That the outside world lay in the full glory of spring-time was nothing to her; everything was so fearfully gloomy and empty in her young heart.

Now she had indeed burned the bridges behind her; now she had no one left; not one heart that understood her;

nothing, nothing! Even Aunt Lotte had written in a strange, half-sentimental, half-exulting tone; it was a great happiness that had been thrown to her upon the edge of the grave; an enviable fortune to have drawn such a lot! Happiness! that was what people called happiness! What was it? To share a man's name and possessions, not to be obliged to fear the thousand-fold material needs of life—that was happiness to them! And for that she was to give everything; her freedom, her thoughts, her hopes, even herself, body and soul!

A nervous shudder ran over her, and she closed her eyes.

“Never!” she exclaimed in such a loud tone that she was frightened at her own voice; and the old lady, who was sitting opposite, stared at her in amazement.

Her eyelids were lowered, and she did not notice it; she only saw a dark red mist before her eyes, and in the mist, drawing nearer and then retreating again when she tried to grasp it, was the figure of a dark-haired man with melancholy eyes and a black mustache over the lips; and in the rolling and rushing of the wheels she seemed to hear sleigh-bells, while the perfume of violets floated around her. Nevertheless, he had turned away from her, had forsaken her—because she was a poor girl!

She started up abruptly.

“My dear child, are you ill?” asked a sympathetic voice, and an old lady's face was bent over her.

“No, no,” she answered, hastily, turning away and blushing deeply. “Only I do not sleep at night, and—”

“Forgive me, dear fräulein, but you groaned so painfully,” and the old lady sat down again in her corner. Then she took up a box in which lay several bunches of violets. “My grandchildren gathered them for me; may I give you one?” and she handed the sweet blue flowers to the girl.

The little hand grasped them eagerly, but she uttered no word of thanks. The giver only saw how she quickly

drew the crêpe veil over her face and pressed the blossoms to her eyes. After awhile she thought she heard a sob, but such a strange sound as when one sobs with dry eyes.

“Sorrow already, and still so young,” she whispered to herself, and looked out of the window.

At the stations everything was busy and active; sometimes, for a short distance, the compartment would be filled, then would again empty itself, and soon even the old lady left the train. She stood still on the platform gazing after the moving carriage; she had a longing to see the child’s sad face once more, but all in vain, for Elsie was still leaning against the cushions as motionless as before. And now came the last stop but one, and finally—finally—the end.

When on a sudden Elsie found herself standing on the platform of the familiar station it seemed to her as if she must be dreaming. Over yonder in the distance were the tops of the mountains and the Thuringian forest as she had seen them hundreds of times! Ah! the beautiful forest! how happily she had wandered through it! And here before her lay the clean, empty village street with its pretty, old houses with quantities of blooming flowers in each window; down below was the simple church, and beside it the shady cemetery; everything unchanged, except herself—except herself!

She walked swiftly on down the street, past the long hedge and through the school-garden. No one was to be seen, thank Heaven! They were all at work or in the school-rooms.

The narrow, dazzling, white steps of the adjoining house creaked lightly as the girl stepped upon them; how natural the sound was! She knew that creaking so well—and listen! the canary—the little fellow Hans was warbling merrily in Sister Beate’s tiny room.

She knocked; and then, in her deep mourning dress and

with the heavy veil hanging around her white face, she crossed the threshold of the apartment.

"Elizabeth?" asked a low, calm voice, "is it really you, Elizabeth?"

A small old woman in the Herrnhuter costume stepped before her, and a pair of infinitely mild eyes looked into her drooping face.

"Sister Beate," she tried to say, but she was not able; she simply threw both arms around the old woman's neck, and the whole torture of the last few weeks was melted in a burst of almost convulsive weeping.

"You are in mourning, poor child?"

"My father," she stammered.

The little woman pressed her hand gently, and led her to the old-fashioned sofa.

"Calm yourself first, Elizabeth; we will talk afterward. Come! drink a cup of coffee. I knew you were coming; there is a telegram here."

"From whom?"

The girl looked at the speaker with horror.

"What do they want? What does the message say?" she added, hastily.

"I am to prevent you from writing a letter, child; and then your aunt will be here this evening."

Elsie sat silent and trembling.

"They will not let me alone," she sobbed at last.

"Sister Beate, help me that I may not grow wicked, as wicked as ever a girl can be. Help me that I may not sink!"

"You are beside yourself, Elizabeth!" said the sister's calm voice admonishingly.

Elsie grew speechless, and the hands which had wrung each other involuntarily, sunk into her lap. She looked sadly and searchingly into the apathetic face before her.

"Sister Beate," she began, in an entirely different tone, "when I went away you told me that I could find a refuge with you at any time; that you would always be

able to give me sufficient occupation in your boarding-school. I have come to-day to ask you for it."

"It happens auspiciously, dear Elizabeth; Sister Angelica's place in the fourth class is vacant."

With these words the speaker offered the young girl a plate of Herrnhuter cakes.

She declined, and asked, "Where is Sister Angelica?"

"Gone to Africa. Elizabeth, you ought to eat, you look so tired."

"To Africa? Probably as a missionary."

"Yes, she will assist her husband, who has a school in Natal; it fell to her lot, and so she has gone; she started three weeks ago."

She spoke calmly. It was as simply told as if Sister Angelica had merely driven to church in a neighboring town.

Elsie remembered her well; a delicate, fair-haired girl; and she also knew that the community were accustomed to marry their daughters by lot. She had never given it any thought, but now it struck her as being unworthy of them.

"She went willingly, Sister Beate?" she asked, pressing her hands against her throbbing temples.

"Willingly? Surely she only told that to God; but she knows that it is His will, and she went cheerfully."

It was very still in the little room. The air seemed oppressively heavy to the girl.

Sister Beate was now sitting before the table by one of the windows correcting the exercise books.

"You ought to rest yourself a little. You look pale and worn out," she said in the midst of her work.

The girl shook her head and laid her hand on the sister's shoulder. "Sister Beate," she commenced, with a trembling voice, "you once told me—not so very long ago—that truth was the only thing which could save us from misery and calamity; it was above all other virtues?"

The small head under the snow-white cap nodded, affirmatively, without looking up. "Certainly, dear

Elizabeth. You were always a good, faithful child so far as human sense can judge."

"What I am going to ask you, Sister Beate, sounds very odd; but it is true, isn't it, that Sister Angelica had never loved any one before; she did not go to the altar with a lie in her heart?"

The meek little Herrnhuter looked up now.

"No, Elizabeth; her heart is like an unwritten page; our life here is so quiet and retired that the strong emotions which torture and rack the foolish hearts in the outside world, do not cross our threshold; we hardly know them from hearsay. You ought to know that, Elizabeth; why do you ask the question?"

The girl suddenly threw herself upon her knees before the sister and buried her face in the folds of the gray woolen gown.

"I wish I had never gone away from here. I wish I had never seen him!" she sobbed.

"Get up, Elizabeth, and compose yourself," said the Herrnhuter, stroking the girl's soft hair fondly and compassionately.

"Help me, Sister Beate," implored Elsie once more, looking at her with wet, tear-stained eyes, "help me that I may not be wicked and false! Say to my aunt that I ought to write and tell him the truth at any cost."

"To him—Elizabeth!"

"Yes, to him whom for three days they have called my *fiancée*."

Sister Beate made no reply.

"You have always been my favorite, Elizabeth," she then said, "but will you like it here? Do not imagine it is so easy to adjust yourself to the quiet here after you have once been in the outside world: it is particularly hard to be a teacher with nothing before your eyes but duty and the hands of the clock which point out the hours for work. Some years ago another dear scholar came back to us; she

was weary of the world and with a sad heart; she begged that I would keep her here forever, forever. In the beginning it went excellently; she worked in order to drown her sorrowful thoughts, and the quiet and regularity were good for her shattered nerves. Then time healed the wounded heart, and health returned and called her back to the old gay, joyous life, and her face was more and more filled with longing, until one day she said, 'I am going, Sister Beate; I must get away; one only crawls here, while in the world we fly.' She went. I do not know what has become of her; and I only tell you this in order to make you see clearly that this is no place for the healing of wounds which have been received in the outside world; if you accept the position, Elsie, you bind yourself for two years at the least. Consider it well."

She still lay upon her knees, and her thoughts began to revolve in a mad whirl; airy, fleecy garments waved before her eyes, red roses and fluttering ribbons; she heard the rise and fall of a melody, and laughter and singing. That was life—that was youth—and like a colorless picture the school-room rose before her with its bare walls. Life rolling away in a dead monotony; and she was so young! The sister's last words weighed upon her soul like lead.

Hark! from the next room came a clear swinging sound through the silence, the song of a violin—a violin! She sobbed once more and buried her golden head in the folded arms which still rested on the old woman's lap. There were the thorns of the red roses, the painful thorns!

"I have nothing left—nothing more, Sister Beate," she faltered. "I will stay with you."

* * * * *

There were guests' rooms in the institution, for the hotel of the little village was very primitive, and one mother or another was continually stopping over from her journey to see some little daughter who had been left at the school.

They had opened one of these rooms for Elsie, and next to it the finest of the modest apartments had been prepared for Frau von Ratenow.

The train was due at nine o'clock; and the principal herself had gone to the station to receive the severe aunt. In the meantime Elsie was sitting by her little window looking with unutterable anxiety at the slowly moving clouds which at one time covered the moon, at another released her round full face for an instant, in reward for which merry play she flung a silver border around each light fleecy form.

What would happen now?

Sister Beate had finally learned all the details, and she herself said that no choice had been given to the child. She was, however, sufficiently acquainted with Frau von Ratenow through her vigorous letters to know that there would be a severe struggle.

According to Elsie's opinion they must have been back from the station for some time, and now the two who held the threads of her destiny in their hands were surely sitting in the little room and battling for her so-called happiness.

"Elsie, Elsie!" called a soft voice, "are you here or not?"

She turned; and her eyes had grown so accustomed to the darkness that she discerned a girl's slender figure standing in the door-way, and recognized the coquettish spring hat and the aristocratic little face beneath it.

"Lili?" she asked, in amazement.

"Well, goodness, yes, it is I!" was the reply. "I have pictured this meeting to myself exactly as I find you, of course, looking at the moon!

"Mond, du bist glücklicher als ich,
Du siehst ihn, und ich seh' ihn nicht!"

she continued, tearing her hat from her head. "Good heavens, isn't there even a sofa here? I am tired to

death. Oh! Elsie, it was a wretched idea of yours to run away.”

“You came with Aunt Ratenow, Lili? She—is she here?”

“Why, of course she is!” and the dainty figure threw herself upon the white linen of the bed and stretched herself out to her heart’s content. “That is, she would surely have stayed in Halle, in all her glory, if it hadn’t been for me. Moritz knew that very well, or he would certainly have spared me this journey. The whole *coupé* full of mothers, nurses, and babies, and in the midst of them all sat aunt in search of you, and stiff as an Indian pagoda. While I— Oh! Elsie, why did you do this to me? There is a supper to-night at the Cramms, and I do so love ragoût of crabs with asparagus.”

Elsie made no response. She sat perfectly silent beside the bed upon which Lili was resting, and looked anxiously in her face and into the eyes which were filled with an expression of intense amusement, in spite of her lament.

“Listen, Elschen, you have certainly provided for extraordinary gossip,” the little one continued. “I must confess, when Moritz brought the startling news of your flight and at the same time the command for me to accompany aunt in pursuit of the fugitive, I had no other wish than to dine at the Casino to-day with the officers. I am convinced that the steward will make his fortune; in their excitement they will drink one bottle after another. Rost is sure to have pictured you something in this style: As a nun behind the grating, with the Bennewitzer kneeling before it, with crest, sword and doublet, wringing his hands; and underneath the whole a scroll, ‘Knight, my heart is dedicated to thee in true sisterly affection!’ The Old German is very modern after all. But now, my sweet child, I should like to know how you ever hit upon this idea.”

She received no reply. Elsie was again standing by the window.

“I can not understand you,” the little chatterer continued. “I think the Bennewitzer wonderfully *chic* for a husband. I assure you, if he had wanted me—*au moment*—although I have here”—motioning to her heart—“a so-called secret love. One must have that, you know, Elsie; otherwise of whom shall one think when reading poems, Giebel’s or Strachwitz’s, for instance? It is highly essential for that; but all the same, I would have married the Bennewitzer. How lovely when he should see us afterward, bound to another; it would put him in a fine humor. He would be ready for Heine: ‘Ewig verlornes Lieb—ich grolle nicht!’ There is no necessity of being miserable for any length of time on account of it, that is only in poetry; but it is interesting, highly interesting, Elsie! Elsie, don’t be angry with me,” the girl whispered, caressingly, and two soft arms were wound about her: “I am not as bad as I seem; and if you will promise me not to weep any more—you thought I didn’t notice it? I tell you you have cried until you have made regular witches’ eyes of your beautiful brown orbs; but if you will stop, I will tell you something that will delight your heart.”

“Nothing delights me any more, Lili,” was the sad reply as she pressed her forehead against the window-pane.

“I have seen *him*, Elsie,” she whispered, even more softly, “as large as life!”

“My—my cousin?” the frightened girl groaned.

It was dreadful to her to be obliged to hear how he had received this blow which she had dealt him.

She saw him before her so plainly—just as he had stood by her side at her father’s grave; looking at her so kindly, and with such sympathy. She had lifted her hand to give the blow then, but had weakly dropped it again.

“The Bennewitzer? the poor discarded suitor? I don’t mean him,” Lili continued, clinging more closely to the trembling figure. “By *him* we girls only mean one, the

only one! Elsie, go along, don't act like a child; you are nineteen years old, and you have been in boarding-school. Ah, yes!" she laughed, "at the Herrnhuter's. I always forget that; no such things are learned there; their school-girls are nothing but innocent little angels! I was at G——, and from our school-room I could just look into the court of the Casino; each of us called one among those officers '*him*.' I saw *him* in Halle. Elsie! do you understand? He was carrying his violin case in his hand and was in civilian's dress. Well—not exactly the most fashionable, but you know military men affect ignorance on that subject: it is better for a large city; for instance, they can ride in an omnibus without attracting attention by their elegance. Now, Elsie, what do you say?"

Elsie did not stir.

"And I have spoken with him—don't be alarmed, Elsie. Aunt did not see it; she was talking to the porter on the other platform. I was buying the tickets—there he stood in the crowd. Elsie, honestly, he is handsome! I knew him too slightly to address him; had only danced with him once; but a girl knows how to help herself. In passing him, alas! my umbrella lay at his feet; of course he picked it up. 'Oh! I thank you very much, Lieutenant Bernardi;' he started. 'I am in a great hurry,' I said, and told him my name—'Lili von Teesfeld, am traveling to D—— with Aunt Ratenow to catch Elsie von Hegebach; she is determined to enter a convent.' You ought to have seen his face! 'Yes, yes, a convent.' I nodded, 'because she does not want to marry her cousin. Adieu, Lieutenant Bernardi!'

"I left him standing there, and hurriedly squeezed my way through the dreadful crush in the ticket-room; but as I was on the point of entering the *damen-coupé*, there he stopped at our train and got into the adjoining compartment. Fortunately aunt was sitting by the window on the other side of the compartment. I was often obliged to get

a breath of air—so was he—that is to say, at the stations. Sometimes aunt would ask over the heads of the nurses and babies, ‘Did you speak, Lili?’ Whereupon I—well, I assure you, I can look astonished—in short, he knows all, and—I am to be good to you—very, very good! He said that as I alighted a little while ago; he went on further. Now when I add to this that he sent a wreath for your father’s grave, and that he is going home ‘on leave,’ then I have told you everything!”

Elsie had ceased weeping. It was as if a golden veil had been thrown around her; she tore open the window, and leaning out looked down into the spring garden, which was flooded with silvery moonlight; a nightingale was warbling in the linden-tree, and her heart beat as if it would burst! He had spoken of her on the most miserable day of her young life! Oh, the happiness was almost too great! But then she turned back, and closing the window with a crash she put her hands before her face and burst into tears. What good was it to her? She was indeed only a poor girl!

The little Herrnhuter was sitting opposite the stately lady in her simple room. Both had red faces, for they could not agree.

Frau von Ratenow had thought to enlist an ally, but had encountered, if not exactly an enemy, still a power which appeared disposed to remain entirely neutral, and who, although she recognized many of the old lady’s decided opinions as just, still pleaded earnestly in Elsie’s favor. The quiet little lady answered her as Moritz had done, only perhaps a trifle more pathetically.

“Well, only leave off, dear,” she exclaimed, at last impatiently, interrupting the sister’s mild conversation. “We do not understand each other yet; I comprehend that. You may be right from your stand-point; but you are certainly no judge for either the child or myself. You revolve around your simple interests in an endless circle;

we live in the world, which has claims upon us all, Elsie as well as the rest."

"But at the price of peace, which is above all else," was the reply.

Frau von Ratenow arose.

"I would like to retire," she said. "I hope that at the least you will do nothing in opposition to my purpose. Elsie *must* go home to-morrow. She *must*."

"Of course, Frau Baronin, Elsie shall decide for herself."

"I think I shall conquer her obstinacy," the old lady added. "But tell me, my friend, is there a physician and an apothecary in the place?"

"Certainly! do you feel ill, Frau Baronin?"

"Oh! it will pass by; 'tis only in case of need. Sometimes I get a crick in my back which makes me incapable of the least movement, and there was a frightful draught in the *coupé*. Well, we will hope for the best!"

"But I will immediately bring you a little volatile liniment—"

"No, indeed, my friend, not till there is a necessity. I do not care for such remedies. No doctor is allowed to come near me at home. I have more confidence in my shepherd—and in his foolish superstitions. But why do you look at me in such astonishment? 'tis so, dear! I will not see Elsie, I have had enough excitement for one day. Say to her that she is to come to my room in the morning. The other little one is with her, of course? Well, then, good-night!"

They had reached the old lady's room, and with these words, and without any further ceremony, she shut the door in the face of the little Herrnhuter. Sister Beate heard her groan once as if she were in pain and were stretching her limbs. She shook her head and went on one door further.

Fräulein Lili had seated herself at the little table be-

tween the windows, and was eating bread and butter and soft eggs and drinking a glass of milk with the excellent appetite of youth. Elsie sat by with tear-stained eyes, and taking no part in the repast; she was watching the gnats which were rashly scorching their wings in the modest candle. Lili's dainty figure sprung up from the chair as Sister Beate entered, and she made as profound a courtesy before the plain serious woman as though she were standing before a reigning princess.

"I have come to wish the ladies a good-night," the little Herrnhuter said. "Your aunt will speak with you to-morrow morning, Elizabeth; she hopes you will accompany her home. I charge you once more: reflect upon your purpose with prayer. Good-night, my dear children; may the Lord protect you!"

Lili turned to Elsie, who appeared more troubled than ever. "Elsie, is it true?—I have heard that there is a baking here which is called 'Brothers' and 'Sisters' hearts, and when the dough is particularly good, even 'stirred brothers' and sisters' hearts?' " She sat down and went on eating with an easy mind. "Please, please order a few for me in the morning with my coffee, and be sure they send 'stirred' ones—it has just occurred to me."

A smile passed over Elsie's sad face.

"You are incorrigible, Lili!" she said.

"Ah! Heaven be praised!" cried the variable little girl, "you can still laugh! Ah, Elsie, Elsie," and she knelt down before the girl, "you are all such devout people and yet you have not one bit of joyous trust in God! But I know though that it must all come right for you; I am certain of it."

"You know it?" asked Elsie.

"Yes!"

"How then?"

"I can not explain that; it is in the air, the air of spring perhaps, in the blossoming and growing out-of-doors; the

birds sing it and the water murmurs it. Now, you poor heart, forget the torment; everything must turn!"

Elsie shook her head and looked into the girl's bright face with the dark eyes glistening through tears. "You are surprised at me, Elsie? I have always seemed so surprised?"

"I tell you frankly I have never troubled myself about you, you were so awfully tiresome in your everlasting sorrow about your lover, the long-lost one—and so on; you were so dreadfully submissive—when, however, I saw you so white and drooping in spite of your engagement with which all the rest were so delighted, then you excited my pity, and when you ran away yesterday, you captured my whole heart all at once—that is surely something. Elsie, every one does not do that; but hundreds of others would have calmly allowed the knot to be tied and would have become Frau von Hegebach. But you may rely upon me, Elsie, I will help you—and Moritz will too, now that Frieda is no longer angry with you."

"Was she ever angry?" Elsie asked in astonishment.

"Why, child, did you have a shade before your eyes? Angry!—she was furious, she was madly jealous of you if Moritz but mentioned your name. The poor man has had a hard time."

Elsie's white face had grown scarlet. All at once the mysterious behavior of the young wife, and Moritz's reserved avoidance appeared before her eyes in a clear light. "And that too!" she groaned sorrowfully.

"Comfort yourself, my sweet child; there was an affecting reconciliation between them yesterday; Frieda cried like a child and Moritz continually asked: 'Don't you see how foolish you were, Frieda?' And she said *pater peccavi* with such humility as I would never have credited her with. Now you will come with us tomorrow, Elsie? you will not stay here? It must be horribly tiresome among all the 'stirred brothers' and sisters'

hearts.' Listen, this is what I think. The Bennewitzer must have observed something by this time, and when he asks Moritz will tell him the whole truth, and then the engagement must be broken—do come with us, Elsie dear.'"

"No," said the girl, starting up, "never! I can not."

Lili was about to answer when some heavy object was thrown against the connecting door.

"Old people have a mind to sleep!" called Frau von Ratenow, in a voice of thunder; "stop your chatter; I am tired to death."

Elsie went silently to bed, but Lili chuckled on and off. Her aunt's resolute conduct was an inexhaustible source of amusement to her. In the night she jumped up; the moon was shining brightly into the room, and low sobs from the other bed fell upon her ear. She put her hand on the soft fair hair which was scattered over the pillow. "Elsie, Elsie, are you crying?" she asked tenderly. Then it was still.

Frau von Ratenow was abruptly awakened on the following morning; a letter had been brought by a messenger, and the little principal herself laid it in her hands.

"Mercy on us! the Bennewitzer's handwriting!" How did he know she was here? Goodness, and all her joints ached so! With difficulty she raised herself a trifle. "My spectacles, if you please, Sister Beate, I can not move."

The little Herrnhuter handed her what she desired and then left her alone. The room was silent; the slight rustling of the paper in the old lady's hand was the only sound to be heard. The words which she read were few, but they turned her face white to the lips. She suddenly put her hand over her eyes; she felt giddy. Everything useless! All over!

"Lili!" she called, her voice sounding like a groan. The young woman came hastily, still in her dressing-gown and with flowing hair. "Give that to Elsie, and then dress yourself," pushing the letter toward her.

“Will you start at once, aunt? Shall I tell Elsie?”

“Elsie?” She jumped up from the pillow; “what have I to do with Elsie?” she cried in a loud tone. “He who soweth the wind shall reap the whirlwind! I hate obstinacy and ingratitude to the bottom of my heart!”

“Aunt!” Lili cried out, frightened to death by the expression of the old lady’s face.

“Go!” she said. “We start in an hour!”

The trembling girl stood before Elsie, who was just arranging her hair. “Elsie!” she said, “oh! heavens, aunt is so angry, so awfully angry!” The little hands dropped the heavy braids and grasped the paper.

“MY DEAR MADAME,—In great haste—the letter must go by the next train. I pray you, in my name, to release my cousin from her engagement. The rest when we meet—later.

“Respectfully yours,

“H. VON HEGEBACH.”

For a moment the girl felt as if a heavy burden had been lifted from her breast, then she pressed her hands before her face and a shudder ran over her whole frame.

“Elsie! Elsie!” cried Lili, throwing her arms around her; but she freed herself and touched the latch of Frau von Ratenow’s room; the door was locked.

“Is it you, Lili?” the old lady asked.

“No, it is Elsie, aunt,” she called imploringly. There was utter silence.

“Aunt!” sobbed the maiden.

Still no reply. They only heard hurried steps and rapid preparations for the journey.

“One word, aunt!”

She pulled and tugged at the door as if in agony. All in vain. Then she turned about and for an instant she re-

mained motionless with her staring eyes fixed upon the window. Then she looked at Lili and it seemed as if she wanted to smile; but the tears gushed from her eyes; the full weight of desertion overcame her in that moment. Now indeed she had nothing left in the world.

An hour later Frau von Ratenow, leaning on Lili's arm, was walking laboriously up and down the platform at the station. The old lady was in severe pain as one could easily see by the expression of the closely compressed mouth. She was not well; she could have wept if she had ever been able to weep; she had only done that once: that was not when she laid her husband in the grave; it was when she had taken a little crying child from its dead mother. "Ah! indeed there has never been any gratitude in the world!" She began to scold about the train which was behind time; about the waiters because they stared at her; about the abominable coffee in the boarding-school, and then about her aching head, while Lili walked by her side in silence with a doleful face and tear-stained eyes. She turned back as often as possible toward the pointed gable-roofed house behind the fresh green trees, for it seemed as if a window must open there and a girlish head peer out in order to look across with longing eyes.

"Nichts weiter mehr hab' ich bergab und bergan
Als zwei braune Augen, dast weinen ich kann."

The words which Elsie had sung long ago would not go out of Lili's head to-day. And then the train came.

A week later an officer went through the little village on the express train. It did not stop, but the young man stood at the window of the coupé and looked thither as though this part of the green Thuringian land which he was hurrying through were the most beautiful spot on earth. Then he sat down again, pushed a violin case somewhat to one side and drew out a pocket-book: taking a letter from it he began to read:

“MY DEAR BERNARDI,—You have placed a pistol at my heart, and though I hate to write letters, especially those of a sentimental turn, still I will try to do so if it can set your mind at rest as you tell me.

“There is certainly not much comfort in the thing; that is to say, not much for you. I will confess that even my hardened soldier’s heart was the least bit moved as I thought of a certain ball night when I felt myself called upon to give you a bit of good advice. It is indeed true. Very early one morning little Elsie von Hegebach forsook her warm nest at the Burg, to say nothing of leaving the most solicitous of aunts and a fatherly *fiancé*, in order to weep over—I don’t know what—perhaps you do—in the quiet of the Herrnhuter colony. All sensible, thoughtful people, and you know how many such our walls have the honor of sheltering, shrug their shoulders and smile. It is so entirely out of fashion nowadays to run away from a rich suitor; indeed the romance begins first on the other side of the altar and then it is so much more interesting. The resolute little maiden has drawn down upon herself the deep displeasure of the old Frau von Ratenow, who, with her practical views of life, entertains serious doubts of her adopted child’s sanity. She herself came back from her pursuit extremely ill; they carried her from the carriage to her bed. According to to-day’s reports she is not any better yet.

“I do not need to assure you that our friends, especially the little talkers among the women, have sufficient material for gossip; that the name ‘Bernardi’ is often mentioned, you have, perhaps, anticipated—and unfortunately you are right. ‘Das ist’s, was mir die Stirn trübt,’ says the poet. But what then? It is a pity about the pretty girl; who, however, in Heaven’s name, is to be blamed? It is neither your fault nor hers. It all hangs upon money; the whole trouble is about money. Why aren’t you a baron with half a dozen estates? Why does man need so much for his mis-

erable existence? Why, indeed? I will leave off questioning or I shall grow positively sentimental. I can not get the little maiden with the sweet brown eyes out of my mind; you simply ought to have seen her on the day of the funeral. Don't imagine that I regret having spoken the truth to you at that time—of course not! it was my duty. It is to be hoped that she will forget even though it is harder for her than is usual; and don't you play the devotee; you can not help it. Man is the slave of circumstances. Farewell, Bernardi.

“Yours,

“VON ROST.”

How often that letter had been read already! how often! It was now laid away in the case once more, and the possessor of that same pocket-book sat and glared at one spot as if he expected to find the answer there to that “why?” which was asked in the letter. An innumerable quantity of plans went through the young man's head:

“the slave of circumstances!” he fairly gnashed his teeth in impotent wrath. Just then the train rushed past a guard-house on the edge of the forest. A young woman was sitting in the door-way, in the May sunshine, holding a child in her lap; the husband stood at the barrier, saluting the train, and the wife's glances rested laughingly upon the flying line of carriages. All at once he was overcome by bitter envy; the children of the people may love and marry and be happy; if they have nothing to eat, they hunger together, as they work together. Elsie would have worked with him and suffered with him; he had read that in her dear eyes. Absurd! The heavy velvety robe of the “duties of position” trails behind the children of the higher class; it is made of a thousand shreds and patches, but is put together into one magnificent whole, and appears so incomparably becoming and comfortable to the rich man yet oppresses his poor brother so that only with care and

trouble can he fasten it to his shoulders, while without it he dare not show his face among his friends. No, indeed! How much misery and sorrow, how many disappointed hopes, how many renunciations it covers! But it is necessary. Society could not be imagined without this garb; it belongs to the whole system; it would be ridiculous to dispute that. The majority wear it easily, and as for the minority, who seem to suffocate under it—bah! Well, they suffocate, but they become accustomed to it at last. Elsie will comfort herself, while for him—perhaps there will be a war soon.

“Elsie will not be comforted!” asserted an inward voice, “Elsie will grieve all through her youth and become a lonely, embittered old maid—the sunny beautiful creature.” And his thoughts went on further as they did every day of his life now. Yes—what then? Should he choose another calling? Instantly Frau von Ratenow stood before him as she had done on that memorable evening, and the sparkle of her diamonds again flashed about him.

“Do you really think that people in other professions live upon air? And do you believe that you will be contented after you have pulled off your gay-colored coat?”

Then he reckoned up, as he had already done countless times: Merchant—without capital? Agriculturist—to remain an overseer all his life? Artist—did he wish to swell the number of the army of mediocrity who are always cast down because they can never reach the mark at which they have aimed? It sounded merciless, and nevertheless it was true! He would rather leave the service and cross the sea; but there were his poor old father and mother, who had pinched themselves to the last pfennig in order to fulfill his burning desire to become a soldier!

Farewell, sweet dreams! fare thee well, Elsie! The slave of circumstances! And what can a slave do?

“He has come back gloomier than he went away,” said his comrades the next day, talking together as they walked

down the street after military duty, on their way to the club. "Foolish fellow! I believe he is still pondering upon his unlucky love, another added; "incredible nowadays!"

CHAPTER XV.

It was again autumn. The wind was once more carrying on its rough play with the leaves and the tendrils of the creeper which hung about the veranda and had turned a brilliant red.

A small fire crackled in the fire-place in Frau von Ratenow's room, and the old lady herself was seated before the window; she was as erect as ever, and while she knitted she looked out into the court. Her face was not as full as formerly; she had altered: the severe illness of the spring time had not passed without leaving traces behind it. She had recovered very, very slowly. She had been in Baden-Baden in the summer, but only to long unspeakably for home. Frieda and Lili, who accompanied her, had been charmed to dress three times a day and go on walks to the springs, and make up afternoon parties among their new and quickly formed circle. She was glad when she could sit alone in the garden of the hotel and hear nothing of the silly noise and chatter. It was better at home. Aunt Lotte was there once more, and now she could speak her mind openly when the conversation turned upon Elsie; and Aunt Lotte was indefatigable in the way she brought up that subject.

"Nevertheless, you must concede this point to me, Lotte; that the child has wickedly and arrogantly put her foot upon her own happiness."

"Yes, Ratenowchen; but—"

"But?—There is no 'but;' if I thought— Now let her drink the cup which she has brewed for herself—compromising herself and all of us so!"

“Ratenowchen, how can you talk so?” Aunt Lotte concluded, weeping: “how is it that you don’t want to read her letters? She writes so that the tears come into my eyes when I simply look at them!”

No reply would follow and the conversation would be once more at an end, only to be begun again after a few days with precisely the same conclusion.

Aunt Lotte corresponded very regularly with her poor darling. She related every detail about the Burg and conscientiously forwarded every message which Elsie intrusted to her. But there was one wish of the child’s heart which she could not gratify; the old lady was not able to obtain a kind word for her from Aunt Ratenow. And also, as to whether the Bennewitzer were very deeply offended with Elsie, she could not procure the least evidence.

The Bennewitzer was utterly impenetrable. He visited Frau von Ratenow exactly as before, and lately they had taken to playing chess together: he calmly smoked his cigar in the salon, and one day he astonished the old lady with the information that he had recently procured a dressing-gown and a long pipe, both of which he enjoyed at home like a veritable grandfather.

“But my dear Hegebach!” Frau von Ratenow looked at him incredulously; in her eyes he was still so young and handsome; at the same time it struck her that he had a suspicious number of gray hairs at the temples.

He had never again asked after Elsie. When, however, Aunt Lotte had gone to the graves which Elsie had begged her to visit now and then, she had always found them covered with the most beautiful flowers, and the grave-digger had told her that they had been sent by Herr von Hegebach. Aunt Lotte had, in a way, been glad to hear it and had once thanked him for it. “But why?” he had asked, “they were my people.”

For the rest, everything at the Burg was like the old days. Frieda had a governess for the children and went to

balls and parties with as much delight as ever. Moritz played whist and still held long conversations with his mother—only the apple of discord had vanished from the house; the light girlish step was no longer heard on the stairs; she used to run down the stairs so prettily; it was not really walking, it was flying—the graceful figure was, all at once, at the foot, no one knew how. She no longer sung her little songs in the drawing-room nor played hide and seek with the children in the deep bow-windows. Something was missing—something sweet and lovely: they all felt it, but no one spoke of it. Only sometimes in the twilight it seemed to Aunt Lotte as though the door must open and Elsie come springing in, crying in her clear, ringing voice, “Aunt Lotte, dear Aunt Lotte!” And at times Aunt Ratenow would start up, imagining she too heard that voice, but anxious and imploring: “Aunt, only one word, *one* word!” and afterward she would be in an indescribable mood, half angry, half sorrowful.

* * * * *

No! if anything were ever to be done with the girl, she must be taught by severity. The Bennewitzer certainly was of her opinion; and perhaps she might grow more yielding in her melancholy nest yonder.

It was quiet in the house to-day; a little while before, Frieda and Lili had paid the old lady a visit in order to show themselves in heavy rustling silk, in flowers and laces; in the complete splendor of full dress; they were exactly alike in pale blue and silver, even to the dainty little boots. They held huge bouquets in their hands, and the creamy “Gloire de Dijon” roses peeped out from the dark hair and adorned the *décolleté* gowns. Annie Cramm was to be married to-day.

The ceremony was to take place at three o’clock and the dinner at four; the whole town was on the *qui vive* to catch a glimpse of the bride, such fabulous stories had been-told as to the magnificence which was to be seen.

Aunt Lotte had been sitting in the church since half past one so as to be sure of getting a good place.

The old Frau von Ratenow was entirely alone; she was thinking of the bridal pair who were just being married, and what a pitiful thing Annie Cramm really was for a wife, and wondering if she would be covered with lace and brocade; they were such an indifferent couple! it was a marriage without flavor. Well! they were perfectly satisfied and—they could certainly make life very easy; at least they would have no care. Then her thoughts flew to Elsie; she saw the girl with Bernardi and she heard her laugh, and involuntarily her fancy crowded the two into the place of the other couple who were probably now taking the seats of honor at the handsome table for the wedding dinner. And suddenly this feast was before her at the Burg and she was sitting opposite them, and—

“Such nonsense!” and she cleared her throat and began to knit; but the picture was so fascinating it came again. As if there were anything more beautiful than a young bride and groom who love each other with their whole hearts! Elsie was really no worse than Annie Cramm, after all—only she had no money— “Nonsense! Everything depends upon circumstances.”

It had gradually grown dark, when a carriage drove into the court. “The Bennewitzer? Ah! I presume he has come for dinner! Then he immediately came in and kissed her hand.

“What?” she asked, “is it over already?”

“Oh, by no means, madame,” drawing his chair close to the old lady’s window-bench; “I only had a longing to talk with you; I wanted to open my heart to you.”

She listened attentively. At last he was going to speak! She might be able to excuse Elsie, she might—heavens!—perhaps—she did not dare to imagine it.

“The dinner was certainly delicious and the wines perfect; one must admit that the old counselor of commerce

has good taste. As for the rest, the groom is an extraordinary young husband; he abruptly left his 'better half' during dessert and sat down by me."

"Very odd, certainly," the old lady assented.

"Yes, wasn't it? However he did not converse badly; has sensible views and appears practical."

"He has shown that to-day!" Frau von Ratenow remarked, dryly.

"How! Ah, yes. Well, yes—*chacun à son goût*. Moreover he spoke of Elsie."

It was out. Her name had crossed his lips at last.

"She sent a little present yesterday. But indeed I had no intention of mentioning that to you, madame; excuse the digression."

Frau von Ratenow was really perplexed. Had the Bennewitzer taken too much of the "perfect wines"?

"I am not sure that you can put yourself in my place," he continued, comfortably smoking, "I hardly think so—and yet! women have an advantage in that; they are more sympathetic than the so-called 'stronger sex.' I feel so unutterably isolated; I don't know for whom I work and live; it seems as if my whole house were gazing at me drearily; as if each fire-place were opening its mouth in a monstrous yawn and saying to me, 'What on earth are we here for?' It can not go on so any longer, madame, for it makes me ill, physically and mentally." He was silent for a moment. "Bennewitz is in fact a burden to me, and so now I have conceived the idea once more—"

He stopped; the ashes had fallen from his cigar upon his coat and on the carpet; he flicked them off with his fingers and trod out the glimmering sparks.

"To marry—" the old lady completed his sentence in a melancholy tone.

"No!" he answered briefly, and leaned back in his chair.

Frau von Ratenow started up and stared at him, but it

was already dark and she could only make out that he was again looking past her out of the window.

“No?”

“Certainly not, madame; I think of doing something else, something which will not necessarily bring the individuals into such intimate relations and where there will be no dread of rejection—for that does hurt. No man is without vanity you know, and even with the most friendly understanding—a little sting is left.”

The old lady sat in breathless expectation. “I am going to try once more to bind a young life to mine, but in another way—I want to adopt a child.”

It flashed across the old lady like lightning.

“Hegebach, you would—you could?” she cried joyfully; then she was speechless; “but heavens, girls can not inherit the property?” she said, doubtfully.

“Girls? Who spoke of a girl?” he asked.

No reply, only a quick, deep breath. Well! the man was in the right: why had Elsie acted so inexcusably? But it was bitter, bitter! Alas for the unhappy child!

“What have you to say to my plan, madame?”

“An excellent one,” she returned, with effort, while a wave of pity for the poor girl who must now, indeed, make her own way in the world, extinguished almost the last trace of anger from her heart.

“At present the only question is of beginning the search,” said the Bennewitzer.

“You will find plenty of candidates!”

“Oh, that is certain!” He laughed for a second. “The small property and estate will draw them forth as the rain does the mushrooms. It would be decidedly refreshing to find beings who would say ‘no!’ Wouldn’t it? Well! in any case I shall place my choice before you for your opinion and I shall begin to search at once. Apropos, how is my cousin?”

“I—I do not know, probably well,” Frau von Ratenow

answered. The Bennewitzer's conduct plainly stirred her up to-day.

"Good heavens, madame, you are not angry with her yet? You are certainly doing wrong! Do you know that, a thousand times, in my thoughts, I have begged for the child's forgiveness for our sins against her? Yes, ours, I say, madame; yours and my cousin's and mine. Our only excuse is that we meant it well."

"What good has it done her?" flashed through the old lady's mind.

"Now I must take my leave." He rose. "You said, did you not, madame, that you thought I was doing right? A man must have something upon which his heart is fixed."

"Yes, yes, dear Hegebach, and may you never regret the step!"

When the door closed behind him, the old lady remained stationary in the middle of the room. "Either he was a trifle cracked or else now, in his old days, he had got one of the Hegebach freaks—the Hegebachs were all queer!"

That same evening she wrote a letter to Elsie. The poor child! To have everything end so. However, it was her own fault. It was an extraordinary epistle, half reproachful and half affectionate, and containing the request that the girl should return home. The old lady did not close her eyes all night long, and the next day she went about in deep thought; at the table she scarcely uttered a word, but the principal subject of conversation was the Bennewitzer's new project.

"The man is perfectly right," said Moritz, "as a matter of course he wishes to leave his property to some one who is near to him; indeed, under other circumstances it falls to the State. Still," he added, "he might easily have laid aside some pin money for Elsie out of his private property."

"Yes," Aunt Lotte agreed, "it is a base revenge to

leave her so entirely to her fate; in spite of all, he is her cousin."

"As if Elsie would accept it!" exclaimed Lili, making a contemptuous little grimace.

"Oh, ho!" said Frau von Ratenow who until that moment had been perfectly silent, "she knows by this time what it means to take care of herself with her own hands; she would take it gladly—but my opinion is that he would be a fool if he were to offer it."

"You do not really believe that yourself, mother," said Moritz, taking her hand.

Frau von Ratenow had ordered her carriage to be ready directly after dinner. It stopped before the door, to the great amazement of her son.

"Where are you going, mother dear?" he asked as she came out of the house followed by a servant loaded with rugs and carrying a foot-muff; the autumn day was cool and the old lady was wrapped in furs and wore a heavy hood besides.

"For a drive!" she replied, concisely.

Moritz did not answer; he knew her nature so intimately, and he was sure that she had some particular design in her head. He assisted her into the carriage respectfully, but at the same time he was obliged to suppress a smile; the weather was far too wretched to have allured his mother into taking a drive for pleasure.

The carriage rolled out of the court while Frau von Ratenow was still busily engaged in wrapping herself up comfortably. At the Stadt-thor she threw off the robes again and glanced out of the window. "Drive down the road toward Büstrow, Jochen, and go pretty fast."

The carriage rolled along the road indicated; the young fruit trees on either side seemed to fly past the solitary old lady, and the autumn wind whistled through the little coupé window; far off in the distance the Büstrow church tower rose up over an oak woodland. Everything looked

so cheerless, so fall-like and dreary under the cloudy sky—and Jochen drove on. Just before reaching Büstrow, Frau von Ratenow ordered him to stop.

“Is that the road to Bennewitz?”

“To be sure, madame.”

“Drive there, Jochen.”

Jochen turned and drove rapidly, for at that moment the first drops of rain were beginning to fall, and one could tell by the black clouds that there was going to be a regular gale.

In ten minutes the horses stopped before the imposing old mansion, whereupon a servant appeared at once and assisted the old lady to alight.

“It is I, Seeben,” nodding to the astonished old man.

“Is you master at home?”

“Yes, madame; will the Frau Baronin be so glad as to walk in.”

“You may put up the horses for awhile,” was the old lady’s order, and then she went into the house.

In old times she had known it well, but now she was only the more astounded at its home-like charm together with its noble proportions. What had the Bennewitzer been doing to the neglected old house during all these years? What a splendid estate the old wilderness had become under his management!

“Foolish Elsie!” she muttered, as she stood in the drawing-room which was so comfortable and home-like and at the same time so elegant. It was such a room as can only be arranged by a person who had good taste, a love for the beautiful, and added to these, plenty of money.

“I will inform Herr von Hegebach,” said the servant, pushing one of the yellow plush easy-chairs before the open fire; “he is engaged just for the moment.”

Frau von Ratenow seated herself, and glanced at the large portrait over the mantel.

“His first wife,” she said to herself. “Hegebach al-

ways did have taste," she thought, still further, as she looked at the womanly figure which seemed to be approaching her from the frame: a beautiful figure, in a soft white gown, the head somewhat turned to one side, so that the face was shown in profile; in the background the Bennewitzer house could be seen emerging from the trees. On the chimney-piece, at the foot of the picture, stood a *jardinière* filled with magnificent roses.

He must have loved her devotedly, the musing woman thought, and wouldn't it be hard for a successor if she were obliged to share her husband's attention with his dead wife? Well, he certainly had no idea of marrying.

She started up from her thoughts, for the sound of animated conversation came from the adjoining room, and immediately afterward the door was opened, and a woman of perhaps forty years of age entered the drawing-room, followed by a slender, handsome boy of about fifteen. They both bowed as they passed Frau von Ratenow, while she looked at them with exceedingly mixed feelings; she was half astonished, half disconcerted. She made a sudden movement with her head, and muttered, "Ah, indeed!" as if she had discovered something important, but at the same time something rather disagreeable.

All at once she became impatient, as if she had come here without the least use, and as if she and everything she wanted were wretchedly superfluous.

But the Bennewitzer already stood before her, and was drawing her hand to his lips.

"My dear Frau von Ratenow, to what am I indebted for the rare honor of this visit?"

"Yes, you may well ask that, Hegebach! It is very odd of me, isn't it, to make such a sudden invasion upon you?"

"It is delightful, madame!"

He pressed her to be seated once more, and then took a chair opposite.

“I will not stay very long, Hegebach! I almost believe that I have disturbed you in—in an important moment.”

“Not in the least; there is plenty of time,” he replied.

“He is a handsome boy, Hegebach!”

“The one who just went through here?” he asked.

“Ay, a fine lad!”

“He is, indeed,” she assented; then they were both silent.

The Bennewitzer had gone to touch the bell.

When he returned, he began:

“I am glad that you have come, madame; otherwise, if it had been possible, I should have gone to you. I am restless and excited. You very well understand why. It is a step which can never be called an unimportant one. Suddenly, to desire to bring a stranger near to you, to expect and demand everything of him which under ordinary circumstances is only authorized by the ties of blood—love, forbearance, reverence; to be obliged to give to this stranger, to be to him what one has been to his own children—it is somewhat peculiar, madame, and it is anything but easy, as you can readily believe.”

The old lady nodded; her mind was fixed upon the good-looking boy who had gone through the room a little while before. She could no longer endure the doubt.

“Pardon me, Hegebach!” she began, drawing a long breath, “but was that fine-looking fellow one of the candidates for the position of your son?”

“Who?”

“The one who just now, with his mother—”

“Ah, madame, no, no! I am his guardian, it is true, and have a keen interest in him; he was my poor Heinrich’s best friend, but—”

“Pardon me, Hegebach!”

Frau von Ratenow breathed easily once more.

“However, I have already entered into negotiations in another place, and am hourly expecting tidings.”

The old lady was again sitting upon coals.

"Well, my friend, I wish you all good fortune!"

She rose abruptly; it was already deep twilight.

"I must hurry home; they have no idea where I have been; besides, there is no longer any object in my tarrying. I— You will excuse me, Hegebach; I came to make a proposal to you. I—I had a plan, but now it is too late. No offense, Hegebach?"

He made no response, and absolute silence reigned in the room, except for the soft ticking of the clock and the rustling of the heavy silk as the old lady fastened her cloak.

"Adieu, Hegebach; you know old women like to stick their noses into other people's affairs; but it was meant well."

He followed her to the door without speaking. Finally he asked:

"Why are you in such haste? Will you not take some refreshment, madame?"

She declined. She had already laid her hand upon the handle of the door, when she turned back a step; the old servant had come in with a lamp, and had handed a telegram to his master.

"Just one moment, madame," he said, urgently, and, stepping up to the light, he tore open the envelope.

"Read it," he then said. "I have been unfortunate again!" and he handed the paper to her.

She took up her eyeglasses, and read:

"Refused; exhorted in vain.

"VON ROST."

"What does this mean?" she asked, hastily.

"The mitten from my chosen son!"

He had grown pale. Aunt Ratenow stared at the message, and everything danced before her eyes; she read the name of the place from which it had been sent, then she

read the signature, and there was a perfect tempest of joy in her old heart.

“You are particularly anxious about this one?”

“This one—only this one,” he said, “very anxious.”

“Give me authority, Hegebach; you scarcely know him; let me—”

“I hardly know him at all,” he acknowledged; “only one thing determined me to select him, the—”

“Hegebach!” The old lady stepped up to the man who still stood beside the table, lightly resting his hand upon it, as if in profound meditation: “Hegebach!”

She tried to say more, but she suddenly began to weep; she was weeping for joy, and yet she was furious with herself. There was nothing more disagreeable to her than to be caught in anything which savored of soft-heartedness; and so she resolutely dried her eyes and began to scold.

“I really ought to abandon you, Hegebach, truly! Look at me! such secrecy! It always turns out like that, though, when two of the so-called stronger sex join together to contrive something remarkably clever. Rost! No doubt he has chattered a lot of trash; you couldn’t have found a better deputy, certainly. And why, if you please, shouldn’t I know anything of the matter? Confess, now, Hegebach!”

He smiled.

“We wanted to surprise you, madame, for you had certainly never thought of him.”

“Indeed?” she asked; and then she laughed in the midst of her tears. “However, in spite of that, the old Ratenow must do her best in the affair once more.”

Yes, assuredly, she must. Late in the evening, Moritz heard that his mother proposed going on a journey. He shook his head, but nevertheless she went early on the following morning. After three days she returned home. Then the Bennewitzer came, and after that they started off

together. This time the others knew their destination, at least; they were going to Berlin.

“Does mamma wish to find a son for the Bennewitzer, because they failed in getting him a wife?” Frieda inquired; “if I could only explain one thing to myself, Moritz—”

“And that is?”

“I always believed until now that when mamma wanted him to marry, she was interested merely on Elsie’s account. What good it will do her to help him to adopt a son is a mystery to me! It is nothing to her, is it, Moritz?”

Moritz was ungallant enough not to answer; he only whistled softly to himself.

Herr and Frau von Rost came in in the evening. Out-of-doors it was raining fast and a high wind was blowing; but at such times it was particularly cozy in Frieda’s blue boudoir.

They had come back from their wedding-journey very speedily; Annie had been everywhere, and the weather was disagreeable; besides, Rost had chosen such extraordinary routes!

Instead of going to Vienna, he had carried his wife to the obscure little town of H—; and while there, he had disappeared completely for half a day, “for the purpose of buying a horse,” he had told Annie afterward; for even in the honey-moon cavalry officers have an undisputed right to attend to business connected with horses.

And then—Annie related it half laughingly, half in anger—the climax had been capped by the tyrant taking her to Berlin; “To Berlin, which I know as well as my own native town. Then I was out of patience!”

“For the rest, we saw your mother-in-law,” she added, as if questioningly.

“Really, mamma is there on a secret mission;” and Frieda shook her head.

“The Bennewitzer was in Berlin, too,” Annie continued.

“Bernardi sent his regards to every one also,” the young husband added, putting up his eyeglass to look at Frieda.

“In Berlin?” she cried, with undisguised astonishment.

Moritz laughed softly to himself, then left the room, as he wished to go to the station to meet his mother, who was returning home.

“Well, my boy,” said his mother, an hour later, as she sat by her son’s side in the carriage which was rolling rapidly toward the Burg, “it is all arranged. But all the turnings have cost no end of trouble. What do you think, Moritz, Hegebach was even obliged to go to the emperor! Such cunning laws as men have thought out to make life hard for each other! In a few weeks the Bennewitzer will have a son, Moritz—and such a son!”

CHAPTER XVI.

It was winter.

The little Herrnhuter village lay desolate under the bare trees; the far-away mountains could easily be seen through the leafless branches, and there was already snow upon the peaks.

The Thuringian beech-logs were blazing and crackling in the fire-places of the boarding-school, and the lamps had to be lighted early in the afternoon.

Elsie von Hegebach was just coming out of the school-room; at least thirty little maidens were rushing around her and in front of her, springing about in the new fallen snow in the greatest glee, and at once beginning an ardent battle with snow-balls. The young girl stood in the doorway, watching how this one started and flew through the air, and how that one struck, and listening to the merry shouts of the children, and a smile swept across her white face; she had been just like that once, too. She drew in long, deep breaths of the invigorating snow-air; it was so delicious after the dull school-room!

Then she walked across the garden, and mounted the narrow, creaking stairs, and found herself alone in her own little room, and the favorite hour of the day had begun for her. Then she would read or write letters, or else sit by the window looking off into the distance, and dreaming. Yes, what would one dream of if one were all alone, with a violin in the next room playing the old sweet melodies! Miss Brown, the English teacher, used always to play the violin at this hour.

Sometimes Elsie could not listen to it; those were the days when heart-ache and longing laid hold of her with all their might; the days when she felt she could not bear this life forever and ever!

Her poor head ached, and her heart throbbed, and her eyes burned from the inconsolable weeping; and she would ask why she alone had no happiness—no happiness at all?

Then she would fly from the sound of the violin, and run away into the wind and rain, out-of-doors, no matter how far; or else she would take refuge with Sister Beate, sitting there for hours in utter silence.

“I can not listen to the violin, Sister Beate.”

“But, Elizabeth, I will give you another room.”

“No, no, indeed! No, indeed!” she would answer.

To-day she stood before the old cabinet, lost in thought; she had pulled out the upper drawer, and now she took several papers in her hand, and sat down by the window with them; she had received these letters about eight weeks before, and they had given her so much to think about that she seemed forced to read them over and over again.

“DEAR ELSIE,—You know that I was not angry with you on my own account, but simply because you took things into your own hands, and certainly with no good result. Well, that can no longer be changed; you must carry

the load you have packed up for yourself; the Lord will certainly guide your steps into the right paths, although I must confess I am not pious enough to believe that our whole life's journey stands written down (like a plan for a building, perhaps), when we are still lying in our cradles. That is the belief of the Turks! I say that God gave us reason so that we might examine and act. You have not used your reason as you ought, but have allowed yourself to be conquered by your foolish little heart; the consequences are even worse than I expected; but silence on that subject; you will learn it soon enough, and repentance will be of no avail. Now, Elsie, I beg of you to come back again! You shall not lose the home of your childhood. Free yourself from your obligations there; you are needed here too, and more than that, when you are here you are eating no stranger's bread, which, according to the old saying, has seven crusts. I believe you will soon come; the winter evenings are long, and it would give me great pleasure to hear you read aloud, as you did last year.

“Your always faithful

“AUNT RATENOW.”

She shook her head.

“No!” she said, under her breath, and laid the letter aside. “I am not a trained spaniel, which leaps over a stick when any one holds it before him! No!”

She sat for awhile, then seized the second letter; it was in Lili's scrawling handwriting. She skipped the description of Annie Cramm's wedding, and her eyes were fastened upon the concluding sentences of the letter:

“A telegram came from Bernardi, too,” she read. “But now prepare to be astonished; the new-made husband seems to be fast friends with the Bennewitzer; for he abruptly left his fond wife in the lurch and sat down by him directly opposite me. They talked most earnestly together, and in very low tones, in a most improper man-

ner; during the whole time, I could not get a glance from the Bennewitzer; finally they drank a toast together, and then separated. After dinner Herr von Hegebach vanished, and, as I learned later, he must have spent the rest of the evening with Aunt Ratenow. You see how it is, Elsie, and now comes what I especially wanted to tell you; I have no more hopes of the Bennewitzer's 'settling down.' Do you want to know why? He is already bargaining for an elbow-chair; he will never marry again. *He intends to adopt a son!*

"Your aunt says it is very wise, but inwardly she is furious; I can see it; for, my treasure, she has always planned that you should live at Bennewitz; when she left you in D——, and would not forgive you, well—that was only as a last resort; she thought to tame you by hunger! Now you know how things stand.

"Alas! dear Elsie, I fear we shall both die old maids, and I, for one, have not the least talent for it. I'm not like Aunt Lotte; she was born an old maid."

Yes; Lili was right. Aunt Ratenow had meant to subdue her; but now, thank Heaven! the Bennewitzer himself had disappointed her sorely. No, no; aunt had always meant it kindly, but to go back to her—never!

She thought of all the long, wakeful nights and the miserable days which she had endured, and then the memory of—

"No!"

She unfolded a third sheet. She had written this; it was the rough draught of her reply to Aunt Ratenow:

"MY DEAR AUNT,—Accept many thanks for your kind words, which have rejoiced and comforted me more than I can tell you. It was a heavy burden to me to feel that I had excited your displeasure, and during the many sad days which have followed your departure the only thing which

has sustained me has been the consciousness that I had done right. Accept heartfelt thanks for the love which you have always given me, and which has been shown anew to-day. How could I ever forget what you have done for me! But do not consider me stubborn and ungrateful. I shall stay here; I feel that work is the only thing which could have helped me in the midst of all the painful experiences of the past year—”

She dropped the letter. Had she written too sharply? she asked herself. But who gathers sweet fruit from a broken tree? Her pen had written it involuntarily. She bundled the letters together again and sat perfectly still, listening to the music of the violin, which came from the next room.

Miss Brown seemed to be in a mournful mood to-day; she had begun with “Home, Sweet Home.”

She was a tall, red-haired, freckled being, in whose eyes there lay an expression of continual home-sickness; her dearest hours, she had confided to Elsie, were those in the twilight, when she was playing the violin.

Elsie closed her eyes and dreamed of the music which another hand had made—a hand which had guided the bow in such a masterly manner, and of tones which were infinitely sweeter and tenderer. How vivid it all was! There was the Hungarian dance, and now—how did the English-woman happen upon the German Volks-songs?

“Wer ist so verlassen wir ich auf der Welt?
Nicht Vater noch Mutter, kein Glück und kein Geld,
Nichts weiter mehr hab’ ich—”

Then she began to cry again; where did all the tears come from?

Now she heard some one mounting the stairs outside. Who could be making such a noise and stumbling about so? Apparently the lamp had not been lighted in the hall.

Now he was going past her door, groping his way, and stepping heavily; he knocked at the next door, and the music ceased.

"Come in," she heard Miss Brown call out; and directly afterward, "Dear me!" Then a deep, manly voice, which seemed to be apologizing and asking for some information: "I beg you, sir, come in, if you please!" she exclaimed, in her broken German.

Instantly Elsie stood in the door-way, peering keenly into the thick dusk, with her hands pressed tight against her throbbing heart.

"Moritz?" she said, softly and questioningly.

"Elsie! my dear little girl, where on earth are you? A man can't see his hand before his face in this Egyptian darkness. Surely, little girl, you weren't expecting me!"

Indeed, it was Moritz's familiar voice. They stood in the little room. Elsie could not understand it yet.

"Moritz—you?"

She lighted the lamp with her trembling fingers, and then she saw his face.

"Yes, it is I," and he took off his overcoat, on which the snow was beginning to melt, and then he grasped both of her hands. "What does he want now? Are you asking yourself that? He wants to take you home, you runaway; I dare not show myself again at the Burg without you."

She shook her head and looked at him steadily, with the eyes that told of so many tears.

He smiled and seated himself comfortably upon a chair near the stove.

"Only for a few days' visit, Elsie. Mother feels she must talk with you; she was not equal to the journey or she would have come herself; she is not quite strong yet. She was very sick indeed in the spring. So now they have sent me."

"Aunt wrote to me a long time ago," said Elsie.

"I know it, and you answered her letter."

Elsie had blushed.

“I could not do anything else, Moritz.”

“Mother wishes nothing further from you, Elsie; simply that you shall come with me. You are free to leave us again at any moment.”

“I don’t believe I can, Moritz—”

“You can, Elsie; dress yourself warmly and come.”

“What do you mean, Moritz? Now—like this! Without any further ceremony?”

“Oh, I have been down-stairs in the conference room for an hour talking with Sister Beate. Everything is arranged.”

“I don’t want to go!” she said, defiantly.

“Of course you don’t,” he responded, “or you wouldn’t be a Hegebach. Obstinacy lies in the blood.”

“Moritz!” The tears stood in her eyes once more. “Ever since I have been in the world, I’ve never given anything but trouble and sorrow to every one; I don’t mean to do it, but nevertheless it is true; to my father, to your mother, and to you. Yes, Moritz, to you, too; and you have always been so good to me. Oh! leave me here—do leave me here!”

He laughed so suddenly and so heartily that the violin in the next room stopped in the midst of a brilliant run, as if it were frightened to death.

“You good, foolish little girl!” and he put her arm around her; “so you knew that too? Well, let me tell you for your comfort that Frieda was the very first one to make the proposal that I should and *must* come and get you. Aunt Lotte, it is true, offered to do it; but Frieda insisted upon having her own way. Are you satisfied now? Well, I’ll let you cry a little; you may have a quarter of an hour for that, and in the meantime, for the sake of science, I will try your far-famed ‘liqueur’ at the hotel. I will come back in fifteen minutes, Elsie, and I pray you light the lamp in the hall; it’s as much as a man’s life is

worth to climb those old stairs in the dark. ‘Auf wieder-schinn’—be quick now!’

She seated herself defiantly; she did not wish to go, and no one was able to compel her. What right had they to drag her forth from her hardly earned peace?

She was still sitting there when Moritz returned.

His honest eyes were filled with grievous astonishment, but he took his watch in his hand and once more seated himself by the stove; his mouth said, “Ten minutes more,” but the eyes said, “I would not have believed that!”

She rose, took her cloak from the wardrobe, and selected a few things from the bureau, and put them into a traveling-bag. Then she stood still, looked around the room, and again, “I can not!” fell from her lips.

The next minute, however, she was down in the vestibule of the main house, ready to set out on the journey, and shaking hands with Sister Beate:

“God bless you, Elizabeth!” fell upon her ear.

“I shall come back soon, Sister Beate.”

“If it is the Lord’s will!” said the gentle little woman.

Out-of-doors the snow was falling in fine white flakes, and the delicious snowy air blew across the girl’s forehead.

“You are warmly dressed, little girl?” Moritz asked, anxiously.

She nodded, and walked by his side in silence.

It was the very last moment, and Elsie scarcely knew how she got into the light, warm compartment so quickly.

“It is a good train,” Moritz said, as they started; “it only takes five hours. We shall be at home at eleven o’clock.”

“At home!”

The girl turned away and looked out of the window. She had an overwhelming sensation of treacherous compliance and weakness of character; it made her almost sick. He noticed that she did not feel at her ease, and tried to entertain her.

"I don't know a single item of news, Elsie," he commenced. "The von Rosts are exceedingly gay. Frau Annie still excels in *distingué* toilets. Lili is on the point of becoming engaged—so she writes to my wife; it is an old love, I believe; hitherto my father-in-law has opposed the thing resolutely—it is a school love affair—but you probably know all about it. Now he has had the good fortune to become a private tutor at Heidelberg, and the little chicken has carried her point; she always seemed so fickle—"

Elsie looked up but said nothing. She was growing more and more miserable.

"Another thing—the Bennewitzer has carried out his plan. Will you allow me to smoke a little, Elsie? Thank you; and now he is the happy possessor of an adopted son. Is it too warm for you here, Elsie?"

"Yes; please open the window."

"Mother was obliged to give her assistance in the matter," he continued, lightly blowing the cigar-smoke into the air; "he certainly never would have succeeded if she had not helped. Now he appears to be perfectly contented."

"I am glad," she said.

It was the first time she had spoken voluntarily.

"He intends to celebrate the event very soon, and magnificently. You may imagine, Elsie, that he is once more the talk of the town."

Yes, to be sure; and she too, probably. And she had been foolish enough to come!

She wrapped her cloak around her, drew her veil over her face, and leaned her head back against the cushions. She was inexpressibly angry with herself.

So the train rushed through the night, and Moritz went to sleep, and the nearer they came to their journey's end, the more frightened she grew—unutterably frightened.

It seemed as if she were in a dream when she found

herself in the carriage; like an old, sad dream—and still such a sweet one!

The coachman's "Good-evening" had a most cheery sound, and the little coupé was filled with the delicate perfume which Frieda loved so dearly. She was overcome simply by the remembrance of the happy old days, and her heart grew warm in spite of herself.

She stood in the hall in confusion, and Moritz excused Frieda for not being there to welcome her. She was doubtless fast asleep, and his mother as well; but Aunt Lotte was awaiting her upstairs, and would she go directly up to her own room?

Once more she mounted the broad stairs with their thick, soft carpet, and in Aunt Lotte's door she saw a beloved little figure standing with outstretched arms.

"Ah! thank God! Elsie, my darling, you are here!" and the weeping little aunt threw her arms around her. "Oh! how lovely that you are back again! Now everything will be all right."

How fast good old Aunt Lotte could talk! and how she compelled her to drink the hot tea! and how silently the girl sat until at last she said:

"Don't I smell violets?"

"It only seems so to you, dear; it is the fragrance of recollection. Yes, yes; ah! I understand that."

Then the old lady insisted that the girl should go to rest; she *must* sleep; she must be fresh to-morrow. She looked so white!

Then Elsie lay in bed and looked around the room, where everything was dimly visible in the light of the snowy winter night. The expiring flames still played in the porcelain stove, and were reflected in the polished inlaid floor; over yonder stood the old chest, and there was the doll's cabinet; it was all so indescribably beloved and cozy.

Against her inclination she felt herself so at home, so

sheltered! and then dreams and reality began to contend with each other, and she fell asleep.

It was broad daylight when she awoke, and the golden sunbeams were shining into the pleasant room.

It was true, after all; she did smell violets.

She rubbed her eyes, and could not exactly remember. Then she flew up from the pillows. Frau von Ratenow was sitting on the edge of the bed and looking very solemn, with an immense bunch of violets in her hand.

“Good-morning to you, you lazy Lisa!”

“Oh! aunt, pardon me,” Elsie stammered, in embarrassment.

“I am delighted that you have come, little one; and now shake hands with me. Now, then, no more obstinacy, and no more hostility, is there? The old aunt never meant it unkindly, you must understand that: and now she begs your pardon if she has plagued and tormented you. Do you know how hard it is for an old lady like me to say to a child, ‘I beg you don’t be angry any longer?’”

With these words she drew the girl tenderly to her, and stroked her face, and with that the bouquet of violets fell on the counterpane.

“They are from the Bennewitzer, Elsie,” she said.

Elsie instantly grew perfectly white.

“Yes, really, Elsie. And I have a message for you besides; but dress yourself quickly. Meanwhile, I will stay with Aunt Lotte.”

The girl made her toilet with her heart throbbing with anxiety. No; it was not possible; they could not have prepared for another assault upon her. Ah, no! Indeed, Moritz had said that he had an adopted son; they probably only wanted to bring about a reconciliation.

Then she entered Aunt Lotte’s cheerful living-room.

“Oh! such a delightful winter’s day!” her aunt exclaimed, pointing to the window.

“Exactly right for a sleigh-ride,” corroborated Frau von Ratenow. “How would you like a sleighing-party, Elsie? Now, however, I beg you to come. Are you ready, Lotte? We are all to take breakfast with Moritz, Elsie.” And she took the young girl’s arm and walked along the corridor with her. “Well, there is no help for it, Elschen. I am really obliged to tell you,” she said, as they were going. “The Bennewitzer sends his kindest remembrance to you—the old one, understand; the younger does not yet venture so far; and he promised your father on his death-bed that he would take care of you, would guard and protect you; and he must keep his word. Now, as you would have nothing to do with him, he hopes to have adjusted it a little more to your liking, so that you may become his daughter-in-law; but, child, don’t be frightened! What is the matter? Hold her, Aunt Lotte!”

But that was no longer necessary, for, just as the door was being opened into the drawing-room, Elsie suddenly leaned upon the old lady’s shoulder, as if she had lost consciousness.

“Elsie! Elsie! She was always so courageous, and will she faint now? Yes, yes; the Bennewitzer’s son plays the violin; he is a very fine, talented young man.”

All at once Elsie found herself alone in the beautiful room; she had grasped the back of one of the chairs, and was listening with failing consciousness. Surely it was not possible! Everything which her aunt had said, and which still rang in her ears, it all whispered of an inexpressibly great and wonderful happiness. No; surely it could not be! Then the music ended abruptly, and swift, joyful steps came up behind her, and then a voice—a voice:

“Elsie, what is happiness, if we have not found it?”

They were all perfectly silent in the adjoining room. Aunt Ratenow went to the *portière* and drew aside the folds for a second, and glanced through; then she turned back to the Bennewitzer, and nodded her head earnestly.

She gave him her hand, and they stood together at the window, looking out into the snow-covered garden.

“Tick-tack, tick-tack!” said the little clock. Beyond that there was no sound, no word from the other room; only once a soft sob.

“Well, show yourselves, children!” Moritz called out, finally; the thing lasted too long for him.

They came, and then a young girl, glowing with happiness and joy, hung upon the Bennewitzer’s neck.

“Cousin!” she stammered, “you have forgiven me; you are so good—far too good to me!”

“I have nothing to forgive, my child,” he said, gently.

“How can I ever thank you, cousin?”

“I’ll tell you how. Come to Bennewitz very soon, Elsie; it is wretchedly lonely there.”

“She did not want me—truly, she did not want me. Confess it, Elsie!” And Bernardi drew her out of the Bennewitzer’s arm to his own breast. “She said she was only a poor girl!”

THE END.



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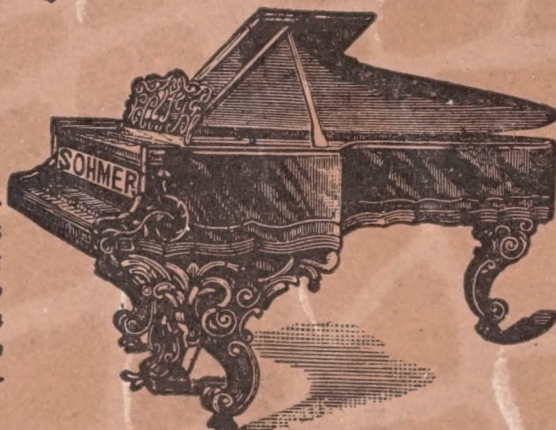
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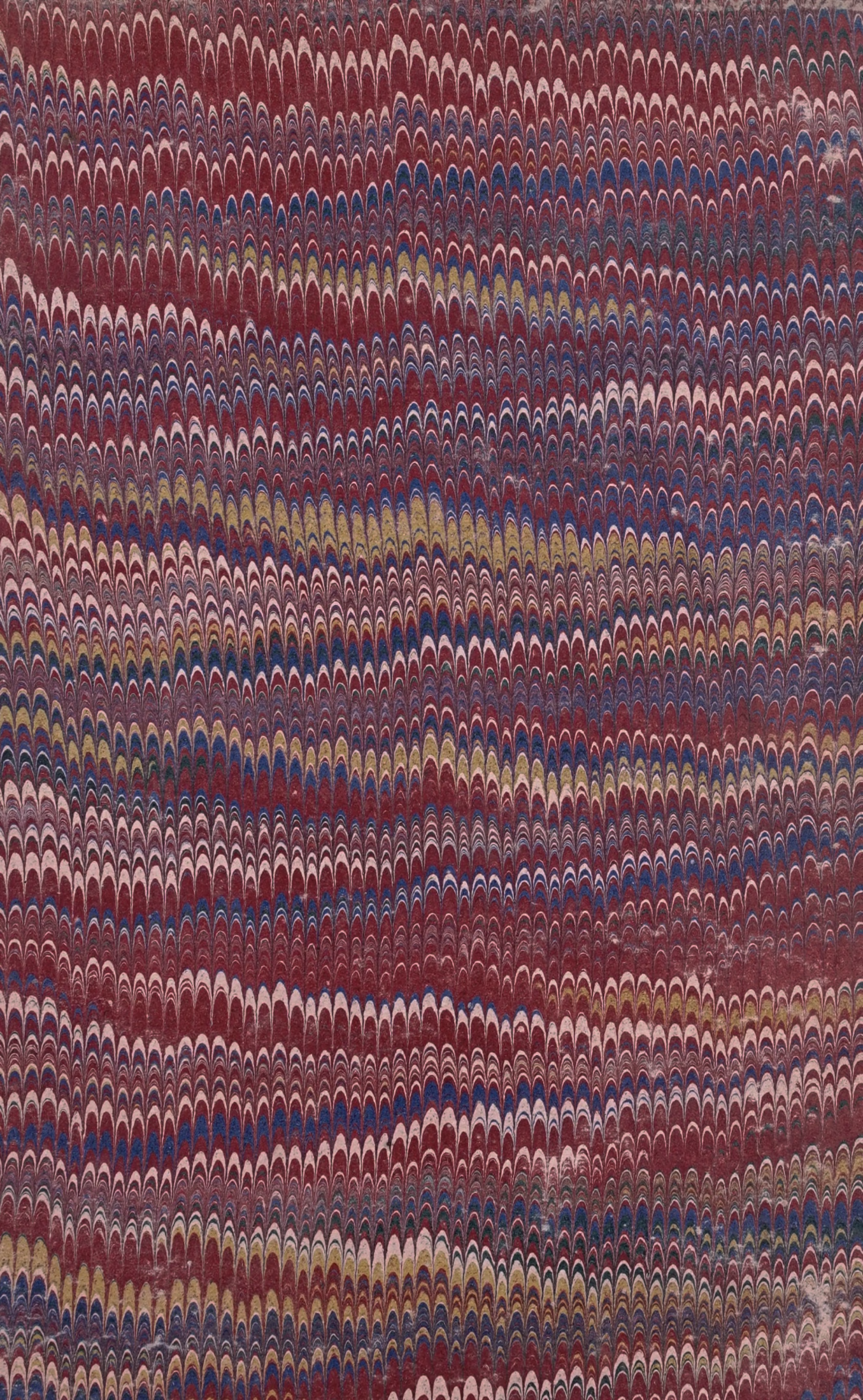
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